# RFD

Number 201 Spring 2025 $11.95

# Issue 202 / Summer 2025

## RESILIENCE

*Submission Deadline: May 15, 2025*
*www.rfdmag.org/upload*

As we all contend with the global "crisis" in politics, climate and return to bias and prejudice, we're asking our readers consider ways of engaging in tapping into our own collective and inner resilience.

How do you tap into a network of resilience and support while not getting consumed by "doom scrolling" and being in a place of resentment, anger and fear while contending with caring for our personal world and those who matter around us.

Someone suggested that like a forest, the network of things is less about the trees above ground by the multitude of mycelium under the earth interacting with the roots of hundreds of trees and plants to react to the challenges the environment foists upon a changing land.

At times it makes sense to present an above ground "front facing" view of ourselves, brave strong rooted trees facing the elements. While at other times in makes sense to "sink in" to the earth, to merge with our environment as a way to keep up communication but stay incognito.

As a community that has in many places made strides as part of being openly proud, vigilant to our place in belonging in community, we're also deeply aware that the promise of inclusivity has not reached everyone equally, fairly or most importantly in ways that improve on our day to day lives.

So, dear readers, consider contributing to our collective glance into self-reliance and collective resilience. We love your ideas especially in how you have built up your personal network, share your images of shaping a strong community and tell us the dreams you want to share via poetry for a vibrant you and us.

We want to acknowledge that there are many parts of "us" and we welcome all of those voices even if they differ. We understand the main goal is respect. So sharing what's significant to you is important in telling "our story".

# Rippling Fields Dance

Vol 51 No 3 #201 Spring 2025

## *Between the Lines*

As the winter turns to spring, we hope all of our readers are finding small ways to rejoice. In this issue we asked readers to submit works on the colors of spring, the possibility for change, the fluidity and sexual tension of the turn of the seasonal wheel. Many people celebrated the return of the early spring flowers and the splendid color they provide. Nature offering us possibilities to renew.

The restive nature of spring engaged one writer to reflect on our own political restive natures when capitalism draws too much from the hands and hearts of laborers. While another writer focused on the mise en scene of the working life of a man in the catering industry and all the variety of people he encountered in a day's work.

We close out the issue with a review of work by Edmund White and a loving remembrance of REB, a rebel with the sweetest heart.

In the upcoming issue we welcome you to share your plans for resilience and resistance while also asking about how we need to consider ways of creating safety for ourselves and those around us.

*RFD* is proud to still be in your hands and it relies heavily on your interest and the wonderful words and images you share with the world through our humble pages.

From a rain-soaked stormy New England

*—the RFD Collective*

# Submission Deadlines

Summer—May 15, 2025

Fall—August 15, 2025

**See inside covers for themes and specifics.**

For online issues, advertising, subscriptions, back orders and other information visit **www.rfdmag.org.**

*RFD* is a reader-written journal for gay people which focuses on country living and encourages alternative lifestyles. We foster community building and networking, explore the diverse expressions of our sexuality, care for the environment, Radical Faerie consciousness, and nature-centered spirituality, and share experiences of our lives. *RFD* is produced by volunteers. We welcome your participation. The business and general production are coordinated by a collective. Features and entire issues are prepared by different groups in various places. *RFD* (ISSN# 0149-709X) is published quarterly for $25 a year by *RFD* Press, PMB 329, 351 Pleasant St., Ste B, Northampton, MA 01060-3998. Postmaster: Send address changes to *RFD* Press, PMB 329, 351 Pleasant St., Ste B, Northampton, MA 01060-3998. Non-profit tax exempt #62-1723644, a function of *RFD* Press, Inc., with office of registration at 231 Ten Penny Rd., Woodbury, TN 37190. *RFD* Cover Price: $11.95. A regular subscription is the least expensive way to receive *RFD* four times a year. First class mailed issues will be forwarded. Others will not. Send address changes to submissions@rfdmag.org or to our Northampton, MA address.

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*"Wolfy WolFang" by Dick Mitchell*

**Back Cover**

*Photograph by Gavin Dillard*

**Front Inside Cover**

*"Morning in Mendocino" by Matt Bucy*

**Back Inside Cover**

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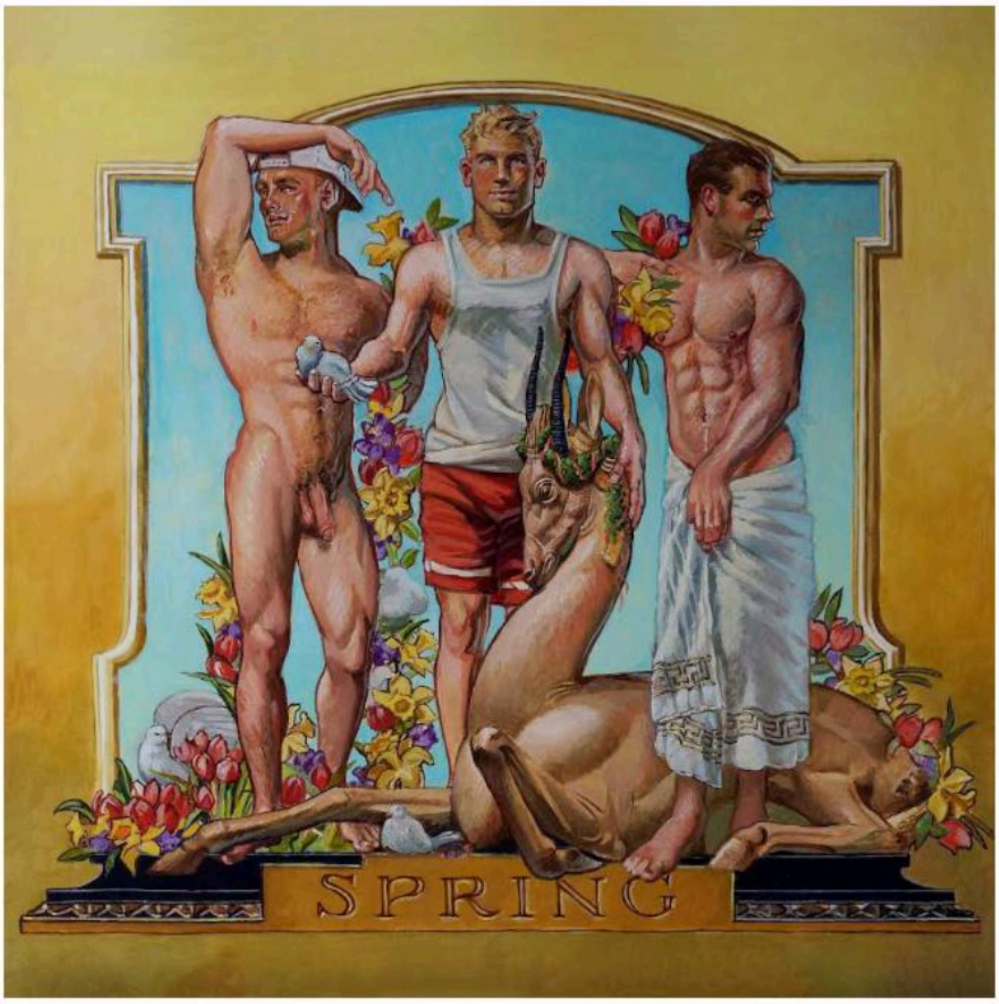

*"Spring > European Version" by Kurt Walters.*

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# Gathering Guide 2025

Below you'll find our annual gathering guide for the year. We've tried to include all of the listings that we available before press time. Our humble thanks to each community and sanctuary which has provided information about their events. We especially want to thank www.radfae.org for it's centralized listings of most gatherings on this list.

We urge all readers to check the websites and contact each community beforehand to get details and confirm dates. A few communities didn't have updated information on their websites—contact them directly for gathering information at the websites below.

Amber Fox, McDonald's Corner ON, Canada - www.akaamberfox.ca
California Community of Men - www.calcommen.com
Easton Mountan, Greenwich, NY - www.eastonmountain.org
Kawashaway Sanctuary – Northern MN - www.kawashaway.org
Short Mt. Sanctuary, Liberty TN - www.radfae.org/sms

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|---|---|---|---|
| Seasons Change | Jan 17-19 | Highland, NC | gayspiritvisions.org |
| Imbolc Gathering | Jan 27-Feb 5 | Paddington Farm, Glastonbury, UK | Imbolc Gathering |
| Tropical Full Moon Gathering | Feb 6-16 | Koh Yao Yai, Thailand | asianfaeries.com |
| Breitenbush Winter Gathering | Feb 13-17 | Breitenbush Hot Springs, OR | Breitenbush Winter Gathering |
| Inner Child/Outer Adult | Feb 14-16 | Vancouver, BC | Inner Child/Outer Adult |
| Dance for All People-Northwest Dance | Mar 6-10 | Snohomish, WA | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Ostara Gathering | Mar 7-17 | Featherstone Castle | albionfaeries.org.uk/gatherings |
| High Close Spring Gathering | Mar 14-21 | Langdale YH, Cumbria, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Queer Magic | Mar 16-20 | Breitenbush Hot Springs | radicalfaerieliberation.school/pages/queer-magic |
| Blue Heron Maple Sugar Gatherette | Mar 21-24 | DeKalb Junction, NY | thompsbs@tds.net |
| Folkloric | Mar 31-Apr 6 | Granada, Spain | hadasdelsol.org/events |
| Dance for All People-TN Dance | Apr 10-13 | La Vergne, TN | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Gay Mens Naked Wellness Retreat | Apr 11-13 | Starland, Yucca Valley, CA | starlandretreat.org |
| Sprinig Community Week | Apr 13-24 | Ternuay, France | folleterre.org/en/gather |
| Beltane-Holes and Poles | Apr 26-May 5 | Ternuay, France | folleterre.org/en/gather |
| Beltane Gathering | Apr 28-May 3 | Wolf Creek, OR | nomenus.org |
| Tiny Home Challenge Season 1 & Beltaine Builder's Ball | May 4-12 | Ramah, NM | zms.org |
| Open House Days | May 6-Jun 6 | Ternuay, France | folleterre.org/en/gather |
| Sowing Seeds of Resistance | May 7-11 | Saratoga Springs, CA | billys.org |
| Spring Love Awakening Gathering | May 8-18 | Paddington Farm, Glastonbury, UK | albionfaeries.org.uk/gatherings/glastonbury/ |
| Massage Weekend StarGathering | May 9-11 | Starland, Yucca Valley, CA | starlandretreat.org |
| Dance for All People-UT Dance | May 16-18 | Spring City, UT | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Spring Gathering — Joy as Resistance | May 16-19 | Evans Lake, BC, Canada | bcradfae.ca |
| Welcome Home Gathering | May 23-26 | Grafton, VT | faeriecampdestiny.org |
| Kench Hill Gathering | May 23-30 | Kench Hill Centre, Tenterden, Kent, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gavados Gathering | May 27-Jun 5 | Gavados, Greece | efthimios@aol.com |
| Camp Wolf PAH | May 28-Jun 1 | Wolf Creek, OR | pdxpah.com/camp-wolf-pah |
| Connecting Together | Jun 2-9 | Beamsley, North Yorkshire, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Dreamscape | Jun 8-18 | Ternuay, France | folleterre.org/en/gather |
| Dance for All People-Wolf Creek Dance | Jun 11-15 | Wolf Creek, OR | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Winter Solstice | Jun 11-18 | Faerieland, Nimbin, NSW, Australia | faerieland.org |
| Sex Magick Workshop (169) | Jun 14-21 | Shimmerback Ranch, Northern CA | faeriesexmagick.org |
| A Summer in Berlin | Jun 18-22 | Berlin, Germany | asummerinberlin.city |
| Summer Solstice | June 19-29 | Ternuay, France | folleterre.org/en/gather |
| Brooklyn Gatherette | Jun 20-23 | Brooklyn, NY | bit.ly/3DeAunz |
| Spiritual Gathering of Radical Faeries | Jun 27-Jul 6 | Wolf Creek, OR | facebook.com/groups/269921889816962 |
| TAINT (Two-Spirit, Agender, Intersex, Nonbinary, Trans) | Jul 10-16 | Wolf Creek, OR | taint@nomenus.org |
| GAYLA | Jul 12-19 | Ferry Beach, Saco, ME | ferrybeach.org/gayla.html |
| Sex Magick Workshop (169) | Jul 19-26 | Queercus, Southwestern France | faeriesexmagick.org |
| Lammas Gathering | Jul 25-Aug 3 | Grafton, VT | faeriecampdestiny.org |
| Monsoon Gathering | Aug 1-21 | Ramah, NM | zms.org |
| Dance for All People-Montana Dance | Mid-Aug | MT | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Breitenbush Summer Gathering | Aug 13-17 | Breitenbush Hot Springs | facebook.com/groups/1657985564505474 |
| Massage Weekend StarGathering | Aug 15-17 | Starland, Yucca Valley, CA | starlandretreat.org |
| High Close Summer Gathering | Aug 19-26 | Langdale YH, Cumbria, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| 45th Blue Heron Summer Gathering | Aug 25-Sep 1 | DeKalb Junction, NY | thompsbs@tds.net |
| The Power of Words and Silence | Sep 5-8 | Barmoor, North Yorkshire, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Lizard Point Gathering | Sep 6-13 | Lizard, Cornwall, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Sex Magick Workshop (269) | Sep 6-13 | Queercus, Southwestern France | faeriesexmagick.org |
| Twin Oaks Queer Gathering | Sep 12-14 | Twin Oaks, Louisa, VA | twinoaksqueergathering.org |
| Beauty will save the world | Sep 13-20 | Opatija, Croatia | matafaerie.com/beauty-will-save-the-world |
| Dance for All People-New England Dance | Mid-Sep | New England | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Midwest Men's Festival | Sep 16-25 | McLouth, KS | midwestmensfestival.com |
| Autumn in the Hills | Sep 19-22 | Coldwell near Burnley, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Dance for All People-California Dance | Mid-Oct | CA | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Fall Foliage Gathering | Oct 10-13 | Grafton, VT | faeriecampdestiny.org |
| Massage Weekend StarGathering | Oct 24-26 | Starland, Yucca Valley, CA | starlandretreat.org |
| Samhain Gathering | Oct 28-Nov 2 | Wolf Creek, OR | nomenus.org |
| Autumn Gathering | Oct 31-Nov 3 | Beamsley, North Yorkshire, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Samhain & Dia De Los Muertos Gathering | Oct 31-Nov 8 | Ramah, NM | zms.org |
| Dance for All People-New York Dance | Mid-Dec | NY | danceforallpeople.com/calendar |
| Summer Solstice | Dec 16-23 | Faerieland, Nimbin, NSW, Australia | faerieland.org |
| Wasdale New Year | Dec 28-Jan 4 | Langdale YH, Cumbria, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| Quarnford Lodge New Year | Dec 29-Jan 5 | Derbyshire, UK | edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk |
| New Years Gatherette | Dec 30-Jan 2 | DeKalb Junction, NY | thompsbs@tds.net |

**2026 Gatherings**

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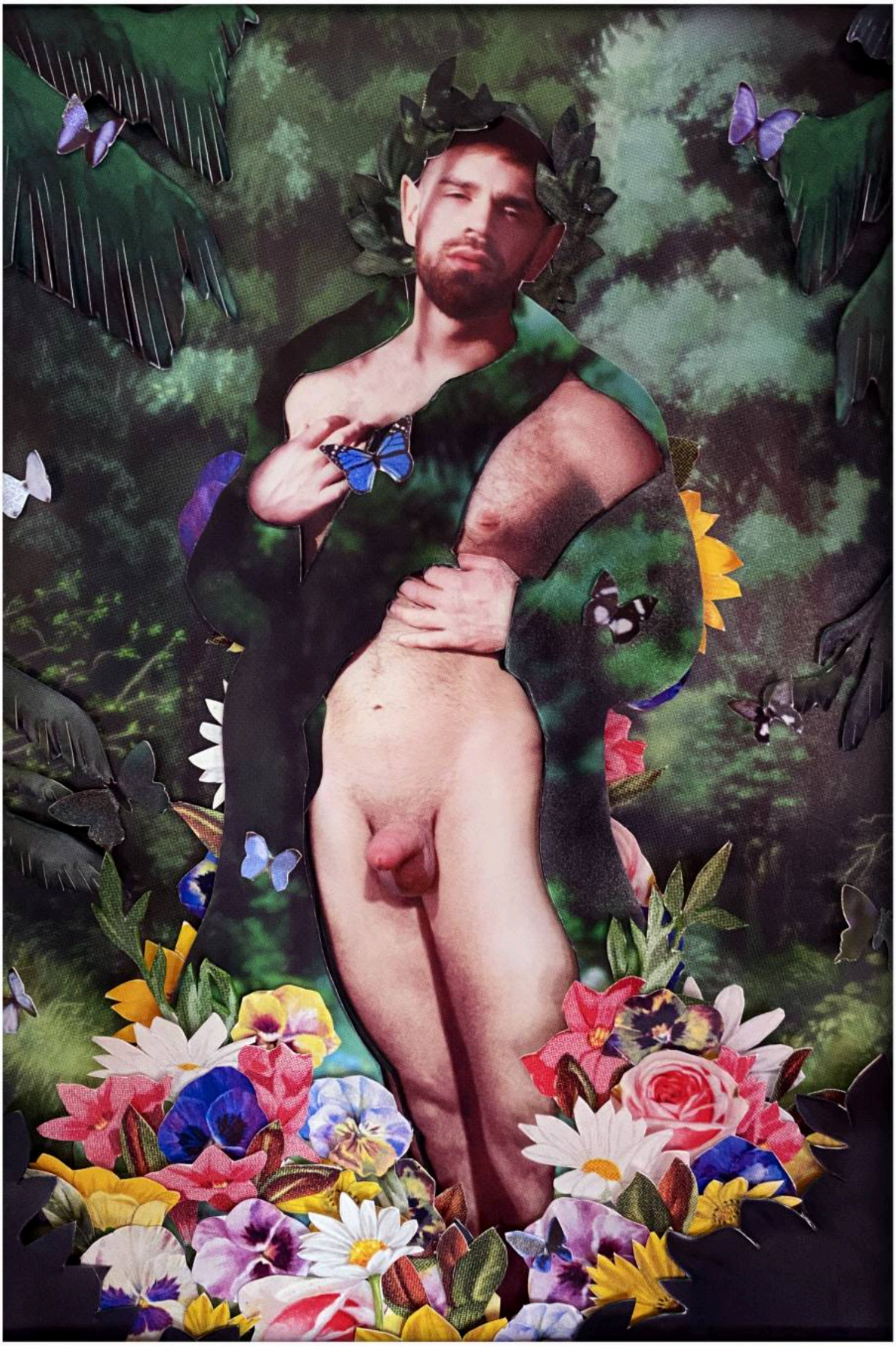
|---|---|---|---|
| Tropical Full Moon Gathering | Jan 29-Feb 8 | Koh Yao Yai, Thailand | asianfaeries.com |



*"Allegory for Spring" by Oscar Zamora Graves*

# Spring in Full Bloom

*by Perry McCrackin*

Winter in Athens, Georgia, arrives with a stillness, blanketing the town in silence and muting the usual hum of student life—laughter, footsteps, vibrant energy. The streets feel empty, as if the world itself pauses before spinning back into its usual frenzy.

As the semester nears its end, the town transforms—downtown bars, once filled with exuberant voices, now stand quiet, their walls groaning under the heavy weight of absence. Coffee shops that once buzzed with chatter echo with emptiness. Sidewalks, once crowded with students, lie cold and quiet. Bare trees stand as silent witnesses to the town's transformation. The silence looms heavy, pressing down like a blanket of ache. The student crowd, once a constant reminder of life's fleeting possibilities, has gone home for the break. Without them, the streets mourn their absence.

I walk through the town, feeling my own invisibility in the air. Misunderstanding simmers between me and the world around me, but this winter, it feels more pronounced. Faces I pass don't linger; the town moves on without me, its energy continuing in every laugh I don't share, every conversation I don't join. In this sea of fleeting moments, I am a shadow—a witness, not a participant.

Despite the quiet, invitations keep coming—holiday parties promising spiked eggnog and twinkling lights. New Year's gatherings, heavy with tradition and fleeting warmth, feature couples curled together on couches under blankets. "You'll come, right?" they ask, their voices dripping with effortless warmth only those in relationships seem to have.

I go, of course. Options dwindle during the winter months in Athens, especially with friends whose lives seem to move forward while mine stands still. I show up, bottle of wine in hand, wearing an outfit that says: 'I'm here, but don't expect too much'—just enough color and style to signal that I'm not completely disengaged.

Inside, rooms overflow with warmth—firelight flickers, couples tangle together on couches, their laughter blending with the hum of intimacy. I sit at the edges of these moments, nursing my drink, watching. The glances exchanged between lovers, the unspoken words passed in their silence, unfold in another world. They feel so far from me.

Their connection isn't cruel. They don't mean to sting. However, the heaviness of being encompassed by unattainable love is unmistakable. I predict failure for some couples; their love, I feel, is winterbound. Yet, the ache lingers. "Together for a season," I whisper under my breath. The words ring hollow, like promises long forgotten.

Winter's presence clings to the room, a reminder that even the warmth of others can't thaw everything. The laughter, the ease between them—it all feels like a world apart. No matter how badly I want it, that sense of closeness isn't something I can touch.

I stay at the edge of the room, nursing my drink, the voices of the party swirling around me. Despite the warmth of the conversation, a coldness settles, the familiar weight of being a bystander. A space remains unfilled, a conversation left unsaid. My gaze sweeps across the crowd, seeking someone or something that could help me feel like I belong in that moment. That's when I see him.

He isn't standing out—just another face in the crowd—but something in his eyes holds me. I glimpsed him earlier, but I hadn't dared to linger. For a heartbeat, our gazes locked—just long enough for a spark of recognition to flicker, then fade.

My impulse to reach out is swift, but I hesitate—just a beat too long—before someone from the crowd pulls him into a conversation that swallows him whole. And just like that, the opportunity vanishes. I glance around again, feeling the disconnect settle in, the faces blurring into one indistinguishable mass. What had I expected from that night? Maybe to feel more connected. Maybe even to meet someone who could make all the other nonsense feel a little less hollow. But all I have is a sense of missed opportunity, and that is all.

The party's energy wanes with each passing hour; I depart.

I step into the frosty night, the silence of the empty streets swallowing me whole. The air bites at my skin as I walk, thoughts swirling around the stranger—his gaze, his presence—like the winter wind. Something shifts. I sense it—like I've let something slip through my fingers, something irretrievable.

I wonder if love is like the seasons—something that appears when it wants to, only to fade again. Am I out of season, forever waiting for something that will never come? His gaze lingers in my mind, haunting me as I make my way back to the emptiness of my apartment.

I am ready for winter to end—not just the cold, but the weight it has on me. Surrounded by life, yet always feeling disconnected from it. I browse my phone that evening, alone in my apartment, my mind still at the party, still on him. Is this it? Is this the pattern—forever watching life go on, always on the outside?

February arrives, bringing an even deeper silence. The town braces for the coldest months, the streets as empty as my heart. The holiday cheer has faded, leaving behind the hollow echoes of Valentine's Day. Everywhere I look, roses and chocolates mock the idea of love, turning it into something transactional. Where is the real thing? I ask that more often than I care to admit.

Just when I'm certain the silence will swallow me, something shifts—small at first, like spring always is. The first daffodils break through the frozen ground, bees stir from their slumber. On one crisp morning on Milledge Avenue, the town itself seems to awaken, stretching and shaking off winter's chill.

The air breathes fresh—lighter somehow. The sun, though still tentative, leans in closer. Its warmth touches everything, softening the harsh edges of the world. A crocus blossoms, its petals quivering like a hesitant promise. A car passes by, windows down, music spilling into the streets. The town is coming back to life, and so am I.

The runners return—shirtless, unbothered by the lingering cold—gliding down the sidewalks with a confidence I can only envy. Their laughter floats on the air, mingling with the scent of magnolias blooming over iron fences. For a moment, I forget winter.

But the runners are not the only ones. The entire town is present. Milledge Avenue has come alive again. Trees, once stripped bare, bud, their leaves unfurling like promises kept. The air hums with the energy of renewal, and I can feel it too. The muted grays of winter give way to vibrant greens and blues, as though someone has opened the windows of the world and let the sun flood in.

And then, just as the town seems to hum with life, something unexpected happens.

I enter the local coffee shop, a quiet retreat, ignoring the hum of conversation, content with my coffee. That morning, I have no particular reason to go. But the warmth, the comfort of it all, calls me in. I order my usual—a black coffee—and find a seat near the window.

I am not expecting anything to change that day. But then I see him.

There, alone at a table by the window, sits the man from the party. Although understated, his presence is undeniable. His tousled hair frames his face, and his eyes—eyes that locked with mine across the crowded room weeks ago—remain fixed on a book. But even in his quiet focus, something magnetic about him draws me in.

I almost don't approach, but something in the air urges me to move. I step closer, taking a seat at a nearby table. This time, no hesitation when our eyes meet. Time stretches between us, a silent thread of recognition pulling tight. His subtle smile melts the last of winter's chill inside me.

"This feels… strange," I say, unsure how to frame the moment. "I didn't think I'd see you again so soon."

He grins, his eyes twinkling like he knows a secret I don't. "Are you sure it's strange, or are you just trying to keep your cool while I do this to you?"

I can't help the small chuckle that slips out. "I'm not sure if I'm cool enough for this."

"Well, lucky for you," he says with a wink, "I'm very patient. I'll wait while you catch up."

And for the first time in a long time, I don't feel alone.

*"Lily Pad" by Oscar Zamora Graves. Photo paper and glitter.*

# American Spring

*By Robert Birch (ffka Robin Hood)*

*"The strong women told the faggots that there are two important things to remember about the coming revolutions. The first is that we will get our asses kicked. The second is that we will win."* —Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions*

During a 2014 neighbourhood forum down the road at Old Man Jim's, Jennifer Breakspear, then Executive Director of B.C. Options for Sexual Health, presented a talk, "Queering the mainstream, or mainstreaming the queer?" After much debate, early abortion activist Dr. Eli Silverman, threw down the glove, "Yes, but the question remains—how do we find one another to organize ourselves in the face of adversity?"

Eli's question reminded me of a conversation I had with Dr. Trevor Hancock, imagining how to effectively organize communities around crises. We agreed that pleasure is a principled method for attracting constituents. My research project was investigating the significant role hosts play during gay group sex events.*

Inspired by decades of radical queer activism, the answer is joyfully clear: parties with purpose, fashion that gasps. How about self-defence classes specifically designed for rope-dart feather boas with matching anti-perp purses? Let's do what we've always done: make ferocious fabulous.

**This is what revolution feels like.** We've been here before. Dying lovers throwing their dead partners ashes onto the White House lawn. The history of queer has been a braided effort between the radicals and assimilationists. Radicals find one another in the dark. Giddy with fear, it is, once again, our time to shine.

**The Hex of Human Sacrifice.** In June of 1914, Sarajevo, it is the assassination of an Archduke and his wife by a Bosnian Serb youth aided by a Serbian secret paramilitary group. Nine years later, the Nazi's ransack the Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin destroying decades of research by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a gay Jewish Social Democrat and Homeopath. His early study into human sexuality began in 1896 interviewing people from Samoa and New Guinea to understand whether homosexuality was a cross-cultural phenomenon (Ballard, 2022).

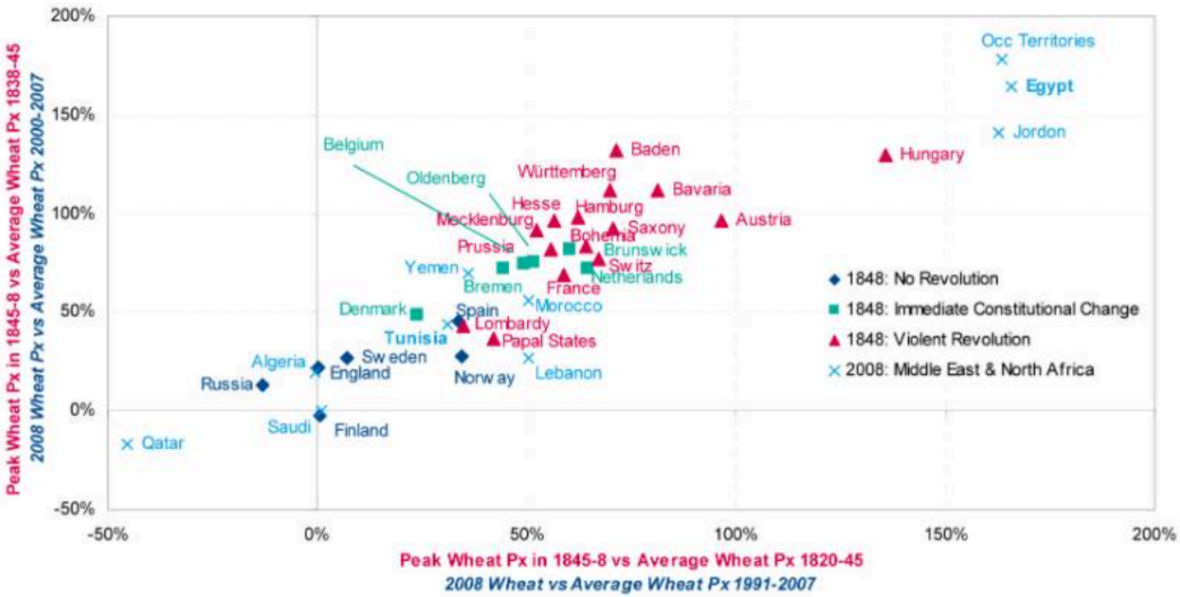
On December 17th, 2010, out of work, selling fruit to survive, Mohamed Bouazizi's meagre wares are confiscated by a municipal inspector. An hour later, he sets himself on fire. He dies eighteen days later. The Tunisian Revolution takes the region by haboob, a giant dust storm called the Arab Spring is raised by the boots of the unemployed, political and human rights activists, labour and trade unionists marching beside academics and lawyers.

CALGARY
ABORTION INFORMATION
CENTRE
269-5

*Abortion centre opens in Calgary, Alberta, Calgary Herald, 4 November 1970. Left to right: Heather Travers; Eliane "Eli" Silverman with Monique Silverman, age 2; Linda Morrill, with brushes. Glenbow Archives.*

**This revolution will be viralized.** In 2024, a presidential candidate's ear is grazed, but a CEO is downed with an inscribed bullet shot across the bow of an uninsured sinking ship. When all but half of working-age adults are charged for what they thought was covered by insurance; when nearly a fifth of the U.S. population is denied coverage for care recommended by their doctor, the rats scurry from the vessel, mutiny is inevitable. "The Network Contagion Research Institute, a non-profit extremism research group based in New Jersey, reports that after the shooting the hashtag #EatTheRich goes viral." Deny, defend, depose indeed.

Not all cattle survive the harshness of an early spring storm at sea, merchants write off their losses. When it all feels like orchestrated chaos, to survivors it feels like a death-defying game of life raft. To the wealthy and violent adjacent, they retreat behind gated walls and call it, "weeding the garden."



BREAD PRICES, 1848 and 2011

At 13:01 21st Apr 2011, duvinrouge wrote:

Marx said, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."

At 16:10 21st Apr 2011, museV wrote:

Maybe Americans will be left with only virtual Apples?

Robert Peston tweeted earlier today... 'Extraordinary Apple results at time of insipid growth in rich west - sales up 83% in three months, annualised revenues running at $100bn.

*Chart produced by Barings Asset Management based on Helge Berger & Mark Spoerer, "Economic Crises and the European Revolutions of 1848",* The Journal of Economic History, *Vol. 61, No.2, June 2001, pp 293-326. Comments following from Paul Mason blog in which the chart is referenced.*

As the priests well-know, bullets may kill, but bread dough rises. When it is our time to stand in line and stick out our tongue will we just say, "Ahhh...?"

*"Ne vous mêlez pas du pain" (Do not meddle with bread.)* —Turgot, economic adviser to Louis XVI.

As I write, bulbs beneath the surface of frozen soil emerge, the promised perennial arrives; the wider spectrum of color ignites the promised season, the golden arch showers over us, our one and only sun. Today, the price of a loaf of bread and a dozen eggs sells for more than the current number of my fingers and toes.

## Welcome to the American Spring

Barings Asset Management warns, paraphrasing Berger and Spoerer, "while food inflation does not provide the brains, it does supply the brawn," (2011). Some say revolutions start when labor is no longer enough to buy food. Theory suggests, peasants riot when they see nobility eating bread while they starve. Depravation storms the Bastille in 1789. Correlated with a spike in food prices, in 1848, violent revolutions occur in France, Switzerland, Austria, Prussia, Hungary, and many German princedoms. In 1892, Russian anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin pens, *The Conquest of Bread* to piss on the economic system of his time. And, on March 8th, 1917, ten thousand women cry out, "Peace and Bread!"

**Queerness wafts through borders of othersame.** We're yeasty like that. Radicals are the wild yeast of the environment, in the air and on fruit. Assimilationists represent a specific strain of yeast cultivated in a laboratory, intentionally added to a process of fermentation to achieve consistency. The radicals are naturally occurring, albeit unpredictable; the assimilationist, those devoted to a single, selected strain are considered more reliable, controllable. As a doughboy fan of the sweet and sour, I dream of a fringe-network of neighborhood bakeries called the Yeastie Boys, making delicious treats to foment local cultures.

**Pitchfork rumours.** To Voltaire, Parisians needed only, “the comic opera and white bread.” Marie Antoinette never actually said, “Let them eat cake!”—were her orifices already too full to speak or listen to the people? We are told to tell ourselves the outrageous creates culture, dullards devour it. When it’s time to diet and decadence is perceived as dangerous, the lesser queens get killed first. When the head is bowed it is hard to see the guillotine coming.

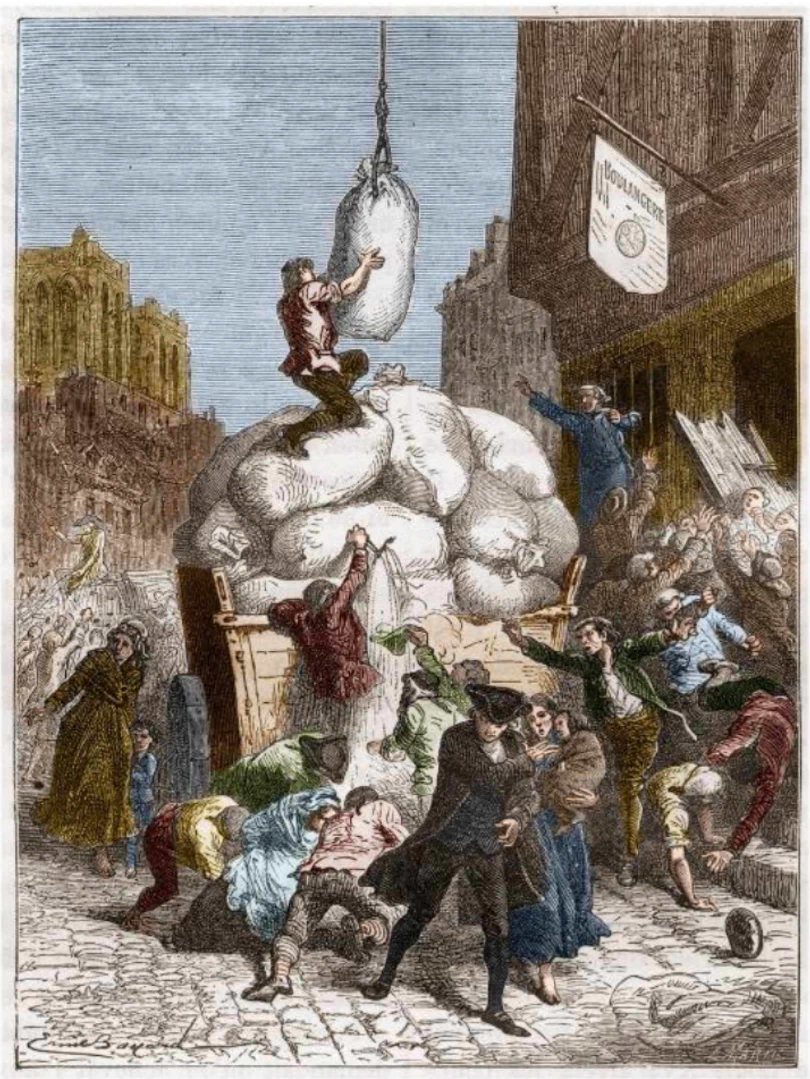
Una McIlvenna, historian and cultural analyst, tells the story of Arthur Young, a progressive agriculturalist traveling through France in the trudgery leading up to the Revolution. Young reported he could see the seeds of rebellion had been sown. “Everything conspires to render the present period in France critical; the want of bread is terrible; accounts arrive every moment from the provinces of riots and disturbances, and calling in the military, to preserve the peace of the markets.” Unregulated wealth is an old religion; the earth still roots for the pagan food revolutionaries.

**“Spill the grain!”** —demand the starving French citizens of Lyon in 1529. Using the same bare hands that tend the fields, thousands swarm to loot and rip down the doors of the rich until grain flows again from municipal granaries to flood the streets.

As early as the 1760’s, Physiocrats counsel kings, parasitic economists who determine the wealth of nations is derived solely from the value of land development and that agricultural products should be highly priced. Under their counsel the crown tries intermittently to deregulate the domestic grain trade and introduce a form of free trade,” (McIlvenna, 2023).

Ledger sheet politics rarely look beyond its snuffed-up nose. The population explosion of five to six million more mouths spanning over fifty-years with no parallel plan to increase grain production result in food shortages, poor quality and inflationary prices inciting the Flour War of 1775, a year before the ‘Great American’ project steals Turtle Island and signs itself into existence. Rioters march into Versailles. Upheaval spreads to Paris and sprawls into the countryside. They blame the peasants for not eating enough vegetables. Bread, the family staple, gobbles up 60-80 percent of the family income. Until economists learn the value of a seed, get on their knees and shove their hands in the soil beside us. Trickle-down economics are designed to fail.

**Desperation makes demons of us all**. Architects of both empire and evolution weaponize the pain of the lower class. McIlvenna (2023), to whom I am indebted here, writes: “On October 21, 1789, a baker, Denis François, was accused of hiding loaves from sale as part of a plot to deprive the people of bread. Despite a hearing which proved him innocent, the crowd dragged François to the Place de Grève, hanged and decapitated him and made his pregnant wife kiss his bloodied lips.”



*The Flour War of 1775 as depicted in an illustration by Emile Bayard (1837-1891).*

**The Velvet Revolution**. In an autumn two hundred years later, in 1989, a less bloody approach to the transfer of power evolves through civil disobedience, demonstrations and strikes. Velvet? Please. Queerdos must have hostessed these early kitchens table discussions.

*When proud pied April, dressed in all his trim, Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing. —Shakespeare, Sonnet 98*

**The Bulldozer Revolution**. Autumn of 2000, eighty-six years after the murder of Archduke Ferdinand, Serbians overthrow Milosevic. Otpor, an organization committed to nonviolence, grows into a mass civic youth movement that successfully overthrows, "the ruthless manipulator of Serbian nationalism, the most dangerous man in Europe," (Guardian). Otpor believes in the principles espoused by the American National Endowment for Democracy, USAID and the International Republican Institute advocating for political reform through "nonradical, electoral, and *market-driven language and practices*." Einstein, famously said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, a succession of energy crises, absolute monarchs bedding corrupt authoritarians, sectarianism and rising unemployment further lash the backs of the economically alienated. By December of 2010, the martyrdom of Bouazizi ignites the Arab Spring, and a succession of violent seasons. Coined by American bloggers, the term Arab Spring is contested as it unduly bankrolls an expectation of western democratic revolutions. Middle East analysts pick it up, nonetheless. According to Maleki (2011) however, protestors embedded in the events identify their own political actions as, "uprising" (intifada), Arab "awakening" (sahwa) and Arab "renaissance" (nahda), using expressions like al-marar al-Arabi (the Arab bitterness), karama (dignity) and thawra (revolution).

As Egypt joins the desert tempest, *The Economist* magazine praises their youthful leaders as a new generation of idealists, "inspired by democracy"—"a hopeful new mood prevailing," in anticipation of free elections. On the streets, protesters chant, "Bread, freedom and social justice!" The West only sees profit margins.

**The objective is not to capture the flag but to nourish the people**. John Keene (2013), author of Democracy and Media Decadence describes initial efforts of the Arab Spring as, "…the radical refusals of the old choice between reform and revolution – remarkably sensitive to the grave dangers and high costs of using violent means to get their way." The social theorist Asef Bayat suggests new social movements refer to themselves as, "horizontal networks with aversion to the state and central authority."

*Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.*
*—Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth, Act V, scene I.*

American officials assuage the concerns of skeptical Arab governments — their training offers 'reform, not revolution.' Obama does not suggest Mubarak step down, merely reform. State Secretary Clinton encourages incrementalism. Momentum rarely falls dead in its tracks; much easier to entice movements toward roadside attractions of temporary relief than to course correct.

**Revolution cannot be solely driven by the insidiousness of the market**. In her work, anthropologist Bogumila Hall challenges the charity works of NGO's, liberal think tanks and a so-called free market suggesting they defang the activism that once snapped at the heels of corporate state actors. Hall champions the *muhammashīn* (the marginalized) in Yemen, challenges efforts by international experts and administrators "to teach slum dwellers new skills and behaviours," as modest methods of development and poverty reduction, the consequence of which depoliticizes the obvious need for radical reconstruction of society's foundational constructs, causes and concerns.

Novelist Elias Khoury writes "perhaps the secret of the Arab Spring lies not in its victories or defeats, but in its ability to liberate people from fear.… The defeat of the Arab Spring has seemed likely to extinguish this glimmer of hope, to return the Arab world to the tyrannical duopoly of military and oil and to crush the will of the people … But the defeat cannot and will not stop the renaissance. If the Arab world has reached rock bottom, it can't go any lower and it can't last forever," (2019).

**Now is the season of our discontent**. Our hearts grieve from the thawing North Pole to the rising Gulf of Mexico, from Panama Canal, to the far reaches of Greenland, —are all the Americas to be extracted and economically collapsed into the smeltering pot of the cis-Aryan Behemoth? The threat to take-over sovereign nations, to make golf courses on the still bleeding lands of a genocide they proliferated and from which they profit —is the vomitorium of binge and purge politics to be the sole story that survives? No. Our hearts rage.

We call on the radical spirits of our own cultural ancestors, including the Suffragettes, the Daughters of Bilitis, the Mattachine Society, from the Cooper Do-nut, Compton's Cafeteria, and Dewey's Lunch Counter, to the Trans, Lesbian and Gays of Stonewall rioters, from the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, to Act Up, Queer Nation to the still high kicking Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who remind us:

*"Joy is an act of resistance"*

*“To take vows to promulgate universal joy and expiate stigmatic guilt”*
*“We are here for our community to foster hope, creativity, and wellness!”*

Like the body resists infection, we make an immune system of ourselves. We queer mutual care and connection. We *for*, rather than *against*. As cultural initiates, queers come out *from* oppressions both overt and covert (those straight-parroting undercover cops in the head). Our queer-burrowing nature is to clasp, coil and curl toward and *into* evolutionary spaces of refuge and reciprocity. LGBTQIA+ people exist under the only flag that keeps growing. Trans and queer people live, die and are defined by earth-ravishing struggles; economically, we’ve made divisive-ends of own constituent groups. We will neither be the oppressor’s conscience nor their scapegoats, ever vigilant to this constancy, our liberatory moment. Let the autoimmune inflammations end.

Queer is a complex network of interacting cells, and cell-forming tissues that protect our body from hegemonic pathogens that produce toxic tyrannical substances. When healthy, we reject the supremacy infected and colonizing malignant. We detox from their inescapable-high school malaise when we treasure one another’s inherent value and how we choose to identify ourselves. They didn’t know they were straight until we called ourselves gay. Poz/Neg.

The morbific power plays of decrepit Lord Fauntleroy’s will come to an end. Their infectious greed shows how sick they are. How will our “intellectual, political and moral” efforts (Khoury) necessitate radical change, deliver freedom by inducing a revolution of cultural healthcare to American queer and trans lives this spring? We counter hate with creative accountability. When infected nations of perpetrators are possessed, we do what it takes to make ourselves zombie-proof. We inoculate by role-modeling, we help to heal, heal to help.

**Queerness rises-up to root out**. Paradox ourselves. Go to ground; Nourish the soil of our arts and crafts; we mycological tendrils beneath contaminated surfaces, tunnel until we make ready to spore. We karaoke the body electric, our faggoty voices raised to praise the queer perennial, our right to flower each spring. We make a glorious garden of ourselves by remembering our secret powers of concealing and revealing, rupturing and repairing. Nature is queer.

*Let’s wild yeast ourselves to ferment our own “Owwwww!!!-Woooow!!!” Revolution!*** — do what we’ve always done in the face of their fuckery, dance our own bread.

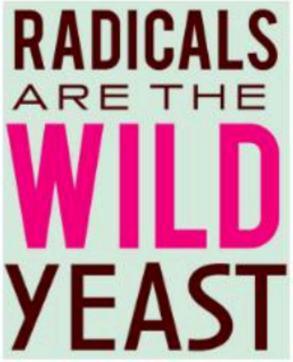
If self-care is sexy, community care is ecstasy. From the trenches of our former lives, we edge despair to rebirth cultures of the erotic; we toughen up to make tender; we invisible until together we invincible. Love’s infiltration, we resurface from long lineages of fierce strategists, soul mechanics and fairness warriors marching, pinky to pinky, with the wisdom of healers, the nobility of educators; we rave to the beat of poets, we writhe with the moans of lovers. We knead, roll and rise or mold in this together.

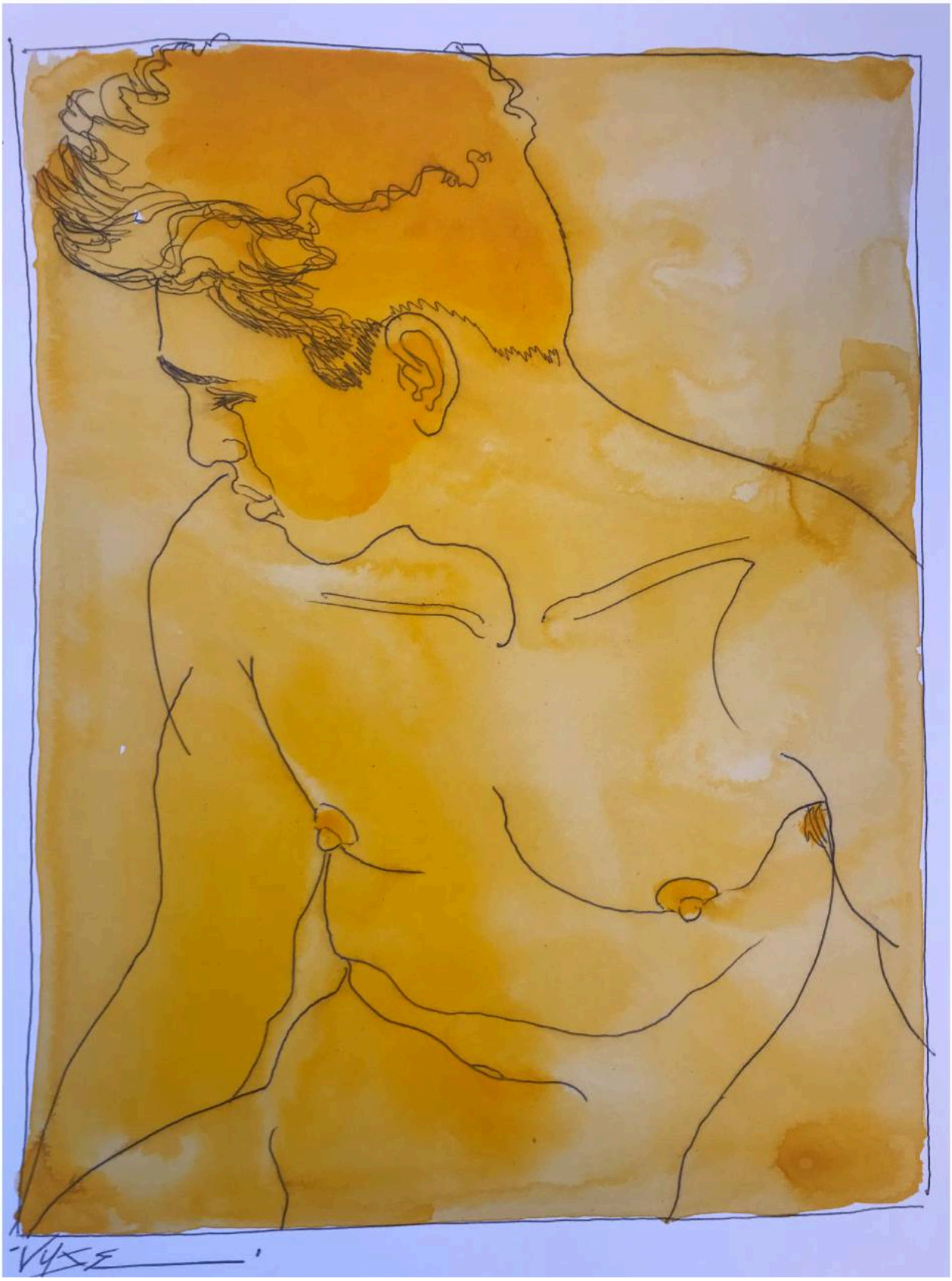
To stand together again under the banners of freedom, democracy and social justice, let’s first decide how the chaos of these grim days will—and will not, impact the remainder of our days. To what mud will we more intimately invite our minds, bodies and spirits if we are to more fearlessly lotus our innate queerness to the benefit of this love-starved world? How and where will we gather—return to the earth of ourselves?

**No one is coming to save us, no one will tell our stories for us.** We are one another’s war bonds; thresholds of trust. As soil nourishing networks of queer, whatever we have been called or will call ourselves in the future, we dignify our efforts and those of our benevolent ancestors and descendants, both biological and cultural. If we are to meet the needs of this transubstantiating world, —appreciated for it or not, we spread our joys, share our harvests, muse our sorrows. Whatever our era-defining role and chosen responsibilities may be, **this is our American Spring**.

** See Pleasure Activism to collectively resource emotion and pleasure to outflank oppressors (adrienne maree brown, 2019).*

***When asked how she copes with a body riddled with arthritis, Marg, elder dyke, long-time nurse and radical witch, says she unapologetically screams out loud: “Owwwww!!!-Woooow!!!” riding the pain until it waves with ecstasy.*





*"Golden Spring" by Richard Vyse.*

# Spring Fever

*by Duncan Hilton*

It's Easter weekend. It's a little chilly, but we're at an outside bar. I drink Coca Cola and eat a handful of pretzels and peanuts and order another Coke. My friends are all drinking cocktails. I am their sober ride home…they will drink until they are weaving and stumbling with slurred words, and occasional laughter and the click of high heels tripping up the sidewalk…

The police pull me over. They give me a sobriety test and I'm unsteady enough to cause suspicion, so they have me breath into a breathalyzer. I pass, and they congratulate the car-full that they have a sober driver…all shaken up, I drop the two girls whom I don't really know off first, then head to Michael and Sandy's house. Their home is like my own, and I relax immediately.

They want to continue the party and after the earlier sobriety test, I'm ready for a drink. They offer me whiskey and tell me I can stay the night. I have six or seven generous drinks and I'm wobbly now and there is great laughter. We reminisce on the days when I dated Sandy. We regale each other with the same stories we all know and we all laugh like it's the first time we've heard them.

As the night get's later we migrate into their bedroom. I kick off my shoes and sit with my legs folded on their bed for a while. We talk and talk and then our chatter grows quieter, and then next thing I know Michael's kissing Sandy. I try to excuse myself with thoughts of sleeping on the couch, but Michael turns and says, "where're you goin?" I tell him I want to give them some space and Michael says, "no, stay in here bud."

So I sit on their bed a bit bewildered and I see Sandy look at Michael and I watch him nod in my direction, and next thing I know Sandy's kissing me while Michael looks on with proud satisfaction. A few tentative kisses and then my tongue is tasting hers. Her's are familiar lips to me. We dated for over a year, then through me, she met Michael.

Michael scoots closer, and I stop kissing her thinking this is strange. But then Michael tells her to kiss me again, and now she's more aggressive. Michael leans in closer as though he's examining us through a magnifying glass. After about thirty seconds, just when we're growing in intensity, Michael leans in and kisses us both at the same time. I stop.

Michael says, "It's okay buddy there's nothing wrong," and then he leans in closer and kisses me himself. I'm startled. I ask him why he did that, and once more he replies, "It's okay buddy, there's nothing wrong. Just a case of spring fever." I was surprised but couldn't deny that I was also intrigued.

I stand up and feel faint. Michael stands real close, facing me. I shut my eyes and I wobble. A strong magnetic sensation pulls us together. I let myself lean towards him, my eyes still closed, and suddenly we are kissing again. He starts with just a little bit of tongue but soon his tongue and mine are fully tasting each other.

I'd never considered something like this before but I find myself pleasantly surprised. I like the taste of him. I like the way his five o'clock shadow burns the tender skin of my face. I surprise myself, as I grow harder and harder.

Michael and I move back to the bed and kiss for what seems like only five minutes, though it's actually been fifteen. I've never had time pass so quickly. I can't believe how turned on I am. Sandy gets off the bed and takes a seat in an old armchair. When I stop and look at her to gauge whether she's bothered or not, she folds her arms and throws a sincere smile at me.

I turn back to Michael and his tongue is back in my mouth. Just then Sandy says "we're gonna play us a little game of Simon says. You two ready? Simon says take off your shirts!" Michael immediately takes his off all in one movement and then stares into my eyes, his whole face lit up with a smile. A little nervous, I pull my shirt out of my Levis. "I'm a bit embarrassed," I say. "I've got a belly" the whole time noticing his sleek stomach and work-strong arms. " Ah, come on bud. Here I'll help you." He gets up on his knees and grabs my shirttail and in one quick yank he frees my head from my shirt.

"You're hot man…" Michael says. "You've got a bit of a paunch but it's sexy, I like it, and anyway your big arms make up for it," he adds before pinching an inch of my belly fat. The faint pinch feels good. I notice the compliment sinking into my subconscious and soon I'm feeling pretty good about my body as Michael caresses my skin and gives my nipples little, delightful tugs.

Then Sandy says "Michael, Simon says I think you need to suck on one of those nipples." Almost before she finishes her command, Michael is sucking long and hard on my left nipple. It feels like electric pulses when he nibbles my tit. Sandy clears her throat and Michael pulls away wiping the saliva from around my nipple.

"Now Michael, Simon says you need to unbutton your pants." He did it like this really was a game, but by this time it had already become far more than a game to me. I was seeing Michael in a whole new light. In that second I felt closer to him than any other person.

"Okay Brian it's your turn." I looked down and by now I was fully hard. The tent in my jeans was declaring to all the world that it was awake and at attention. I slowly unbuttoned my jeans and my hard-on sprang out of the tight jockey shorts. "Looks like little Brian isn't shy," Michael says teasingly and appreciatively.

I look over as Michael pulls his erection through the fly of his boxers. I notice he's uncut, and a little shorter than myself but much thicker. I also notice that unlike the rest of his skin, his cock is a dark brown with just the slightest glimpse of the engorged head of his penis showing.

"Now," Sandy says, "Simon says give Brian's dick a few strokes Michael." He does it and I nearly cum, I'm so turned on by this unexpected turn of events. "Simon says now it's your turn Brian!" I reach over and find out how pleasant it is to stroke an uncut dick. Just like it was made for this, the tight skin slides up and down real smooth and easy and his big blue head keeps making an appearance. Michael stops me and says, "whoah buddy, I'm not ready to cum. I'm sure Sandy has some more in mind for us."

"I certainly do" says Sandy, like a naughty little girl. "Now," she says, "Simon says it's time for you two to get naked." This time I'm really eager so I hop off the bed and pull my drawers down where my seven and a half inches slaps my lower belly. Michael's is as hard as a rock too, but with all that girth I guess his is a bit weighed down.

I notice the patterning of his dark hair. It's perfect Just a tuft in-between his pecks, short, straight hairs fanning out across his chest, and a little trail leading from his bellybutton down to his cock. My hair is blond, but my pubes are a rusty red. Michael comments on my red pubes. He tells us how red heads are supposed to be more well endowed. "I guess the rumors are true" Michael declares in his matter-of-fact way. "I'm not all that big" I say "and I'm blond." "You're just

*"Like Balm for the Bees" by Stephen Mead. Montage.*

a red head masquerading as a blond" Michael teases.

Sandy doesn't have to try hard to bring our attention back to the matter at hand. "Simon says hug each other tight and kiss some more." Michael walks over to me and puts his arms around my lower back pushing both our cocks together. I notice how hot his genitals are against mine. Michael leans his head in and softly kisses me. He exhales through his nose and the breath heats up my lips.

I return his kiss slowly like he kissed me. Soon we are playing with each others lips and tongues, sucking, nibbling allowing our tongues full range of motion. He tastes like booze and I wonder, for a brief second, how we'll feel about this the next morning. I push those thoughts out of my head. "Tomorrow will take care of itself," I repeat my mom's age-old words of advice to myself.

Sandy clears her throat and she says "Simon says both of you lay on the bed together." Our lips only separate for a second or two as we move to the bed. We start to get more playful and roll around on the sheets as we hold on tight to each other. We do this for five minutes or more, sort of wrestling.

Sandy clears her throat again and says, "Simon says sixty-nine each other." I don't know what she means by this, and Michael notices. He smiles, and moves his head down next to my crotch and being about the same height I find his uncut member right in my face which suits me fine.

Michael's no longer rock hard, and I can feel that I'm not as well. I bring my hand up and marvel at his uncut penis again. It was made to be stroked, and so that's what I do and soon he's rock hard again, and then I feel it. My cock is enveloped in soft, wet warmness. Michael has my whole penis in his mouth. He seems to be swallowing it.

I am soon doing the same to him. I have to be careful not to graze his fat, brown cock with my teeth. I just instinctually know what to do, and this is certainly not Michael's first time at this. He keeps swallowing my cock, in and out. I do the same to him. Then Michael grabs my penis and rubs the head against his five o'clock shadow. This sends a not unpleasant jolt through me.

"Now," Sandy says, "Simon says show Brian how you tickle his tail." I have no idea what she's talking about, but Michael Does. He turns around so his face is close to mine. I can smell my own musk on his breath and wonder if he can smell his own on mine. He gives me a deep kiss, and then very slowly moves his mouth to my ears tonguing them and blowing softly, and then my neck, sucking and nibbling, sending shivers through me. I'm tingling as he's expertly runs his tongue back and forth along my ribcage, and breathes heat into my arm pits. Soon his mouth is around one nipple and then the other. This time he bites a little harder and a little longer and I surprise myself with a loud moans.

I'm spread eagle on their bed, everywhere his mouth goes he tastes me, and lightly bites me there. Then he is at my cock again. He swallows it in one gulp and then uses his spit as lubrication and gives me a fifteen second hand job. Then he pops one of my testicles into his mouth and sucks just enough to send a pleasant ache into my stomach. He does the same with the other.

Then he surprises me by pulling my legs up and over his shoulders. He kisses and nibbles the area between my balls and my ass. I find myself moaning again. Then to my utter surprise, he licks my ass and there was just the slightest inkling of what was to come.

Soon he was licking and breathing hot breath. I found my back naturally arching. And, then it happened, he thrust his strong tongue into my hole. A guttural sound escaped my mouth. I could feel him wriggling his tongue in there and the sensation was beyond my wildest dreams. He went on like this for three or four minutes, the whole time my body spasming in utter delight.

"Simon says lube him," Sandy squealed. Michael spit into his own hands, and with the lube of his spit he slowly worked one finger into me. There was the sensation of being full, In and out, and more spit. I don't know how but soon I could feel two, and then three fingers inside of me.

"Do it honey," Sandy hollered. Michael spit into his hand and then stroked his own cock for a moment until it was wet and as hard as a rock. He was very gentle with me. Ever so slowly he replaced those three fingers with the head of his cock, then even slower he pushed those six lubed inches of thick, uncut meat into me and there was no pain, just the sensation of fullness.

Slowly, in and out. "Faster honey" Sandy cried and Michael sped up and began to shake his head and moan. I was in a space of my own. Deep down in the core of me there was an itch that was finally being scratched. As his dick pounded my prostate, soon I found myself ejaculating spontaneously and with the most satisfaction I'd ever experienced. Nearly at the same time Michael stopped shaking his head and he went slow again and I could feel a warm sensation as he came deep down inside of me and boy did he moan.

With that he collapsed on me, breathing hard, saying "that's it buddy, you got a real great ass." He kissed me deep again and I could taste the mustiness of my hole on his tongue, like the soil of the earth; and everything that grows from it all in one sensation of what I have come to call love.

The next morning I was the last one awake. My mind could barely contain the enormity of the previous night. I had all sorts of conflicting emotions. Were we still friends? Would there be embarrassment, and an awkward goodbye? Was Sandy really okay with this? Would Michael even look me in the eyes?

I found my clothes on the floor and got dressed. I left the room and could hear Michael and Sandy talking in the kitchen. I hesitated for a minute or two trying to hear what they were talking about, I was so nervous, but when I finally appeared in the doorway they were nothing but smiles.

"Happy Easter," Michael said, "here Bri, let me pour you a cup of coffee. Come sit down." I was at a loss for words. "Do you want some breakfast," Michael asked. "Uh, sure, sure. That would be great." They both worked frying the eggs and bacon and buttering the toast.

We all sat together like a cozy little family. "We sure had a blast last night didn't we Bri," Michael stated. "Uh, yeah, it was fun, real fun." Reflecting back on it I said, "I hope I didn't get too out of hand." Michael said, "you were great and it's okay buddy, there's nothing wrong. There's so much more we could do, we were hoping you don't have plans next Saturday evening?"

*"Garden Party" by Oscar Zamora Graves. Photo paper, construction paper, glitter, and rhinestones.*

# Underneath a Caribbean Moon

There were crickets singing during the night.
As we fell asleep,
a crescent moon, shining, from a Caribbean sky.
And dreams, fell upon the pillows,
were we rested our heads.
This was home.

Roosters and rays of light,
a morning's freshness,
scattered across the earth,
in raindrops.
And this is where I find you,
nestled within me,
the winds carrying the sounds of the sea,
and a path, leading us to the edge of the world,
with waves inviting us into familiar waters,
and covering us with life.

That is the place, our passion becomes erect,
and we sink into each other,
captured souls, who have found one another,
who had been lost, in a world, of invisible chains.
Our love, the creation of freedom,
from the thoughts that have plagued man since Adam,
and separated him from Eve.

Traveling through the day,
wanting more of the air,
that the other breathes,
only to give it back, filled with warmth.
A passage that moves the heart.
It explodes, a million times, within the presence of
love.
And as dusk falls and the crickets resume their
enchanted melody,
we find the bed, that dwells within the house, where
we lay our heads, upon pillows
That are filled with dreams and we fall asleep in
each other's arms.

*—Alistar Chance*

# Rain Storm

That day, it rained in a straight line,
and the river led me to you.
Two souls, once separated by the sea,
now united, by the storm.
The clouds overhead,
lit the sky with the color of blues.
And the wind blew rhythm in the air.
My soul song- is what you heard.
And you opened your heart to listen.

You and I spoke in silence,
as my pain melted away,
because I, had found you-
a reflection of hope,
fire burning on a winter's day,
rain falling in a straight line,
and you and I, kissing in the grey.

*—Alistar Chance*

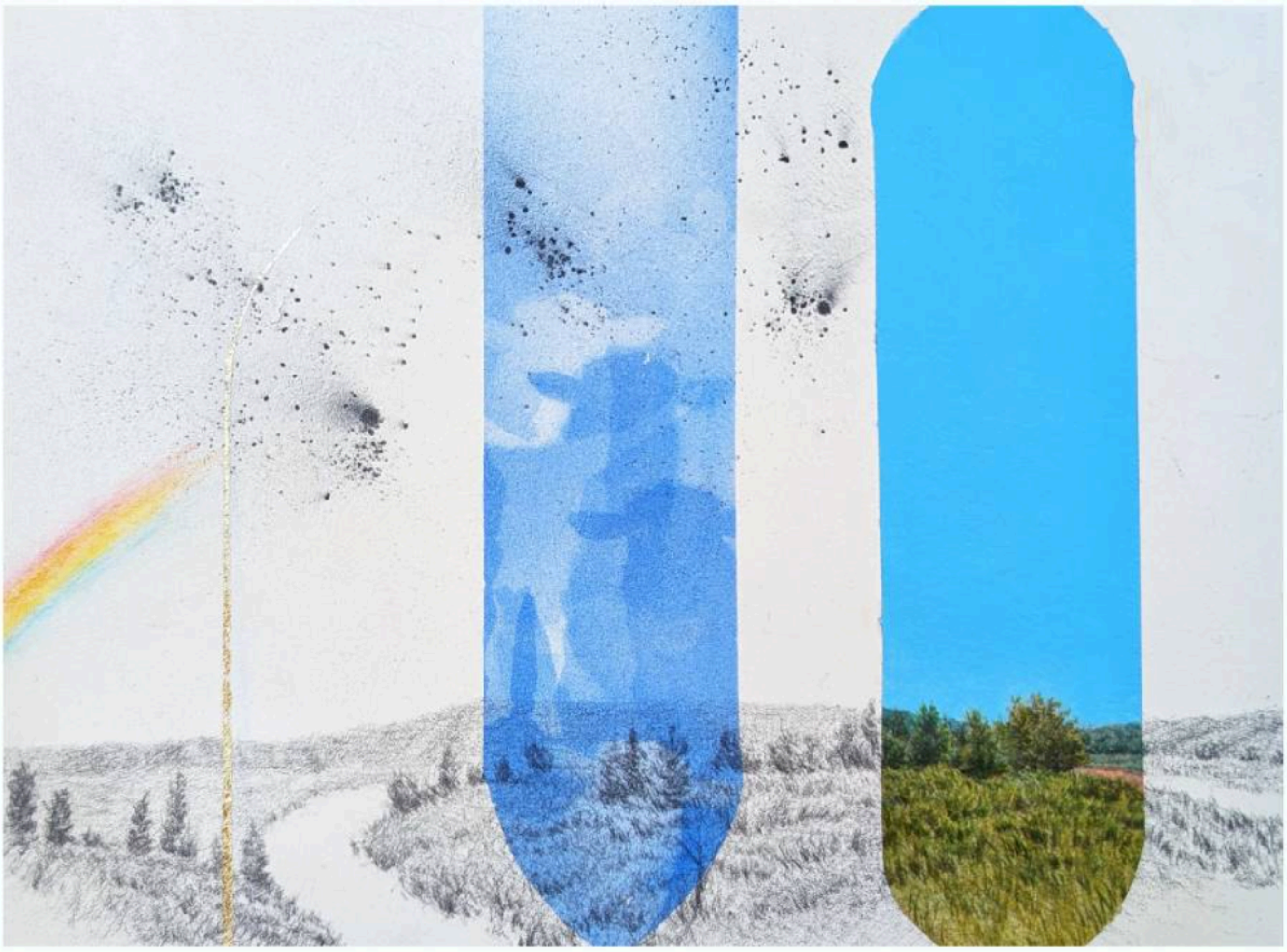
# Pink Moon, April

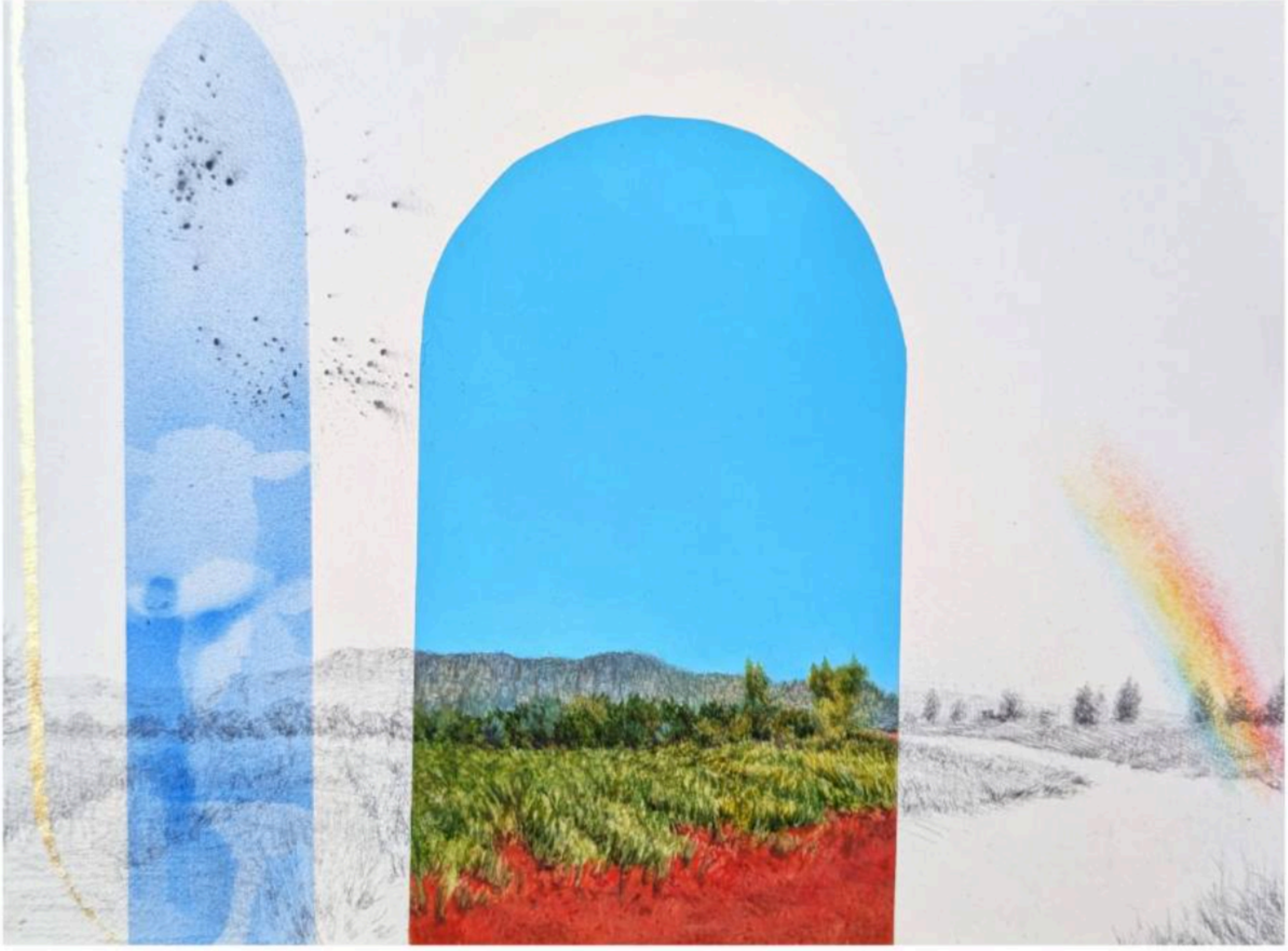
Never beaten for being a sissy,
grown up privileged
in the 1960s suburbs,
happy, hugged, cherished—
given guitars at Christmas,
a car for graduation—
told you could be, do, have
anything your white heart wanted,
desired, dreamed of—

except those two rooms over a garage
of a larger, vacant, more prosperous property
viewed one teenaged day with father—
private space pretended, imagined:
first writers' apartment, a garret in Paris,
first book of poems.
                                        Pulled aside,
out of family earshot, away from the realtor,
your plans were called perverted, he said you wanted
that space for shenanigans similar
to those you'd been caught doing
on jamboree campouts. You cried
for years, wrote only in the living room,
on the porch, at the dining room table.
Overnight visits strictly forbidden.

Life full of privilege, writing now
in the car, secretly, the parking lot
of a blue-collar job as the Pink Moon sets
and the sun begins to rise.

*—D. Scott Humphries*





*Top: "Eleventh Hour" and Bottom: "Field Day" both by Kevin Owens.*

# Rambling in the Garden (for M.)

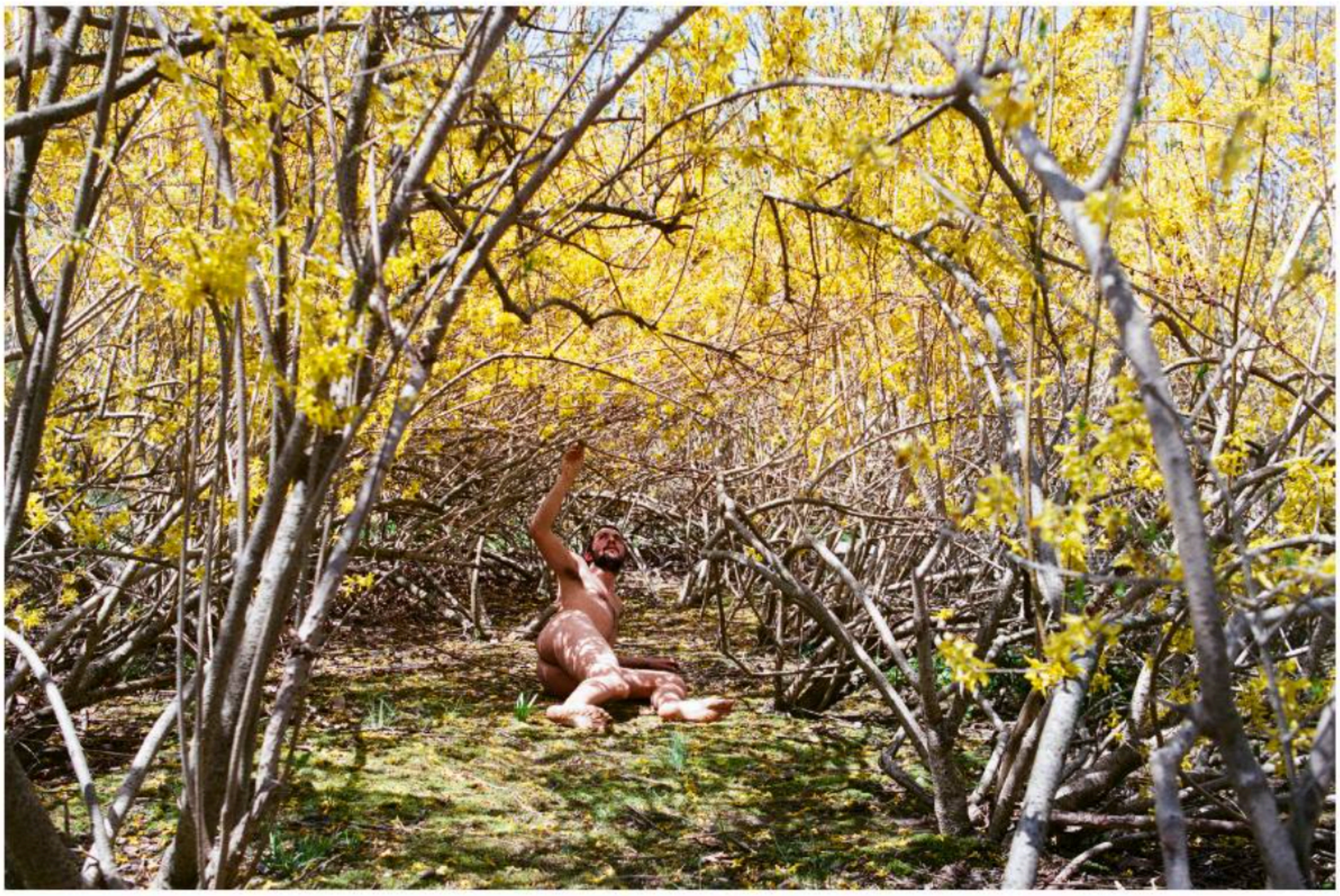
Surely this lily, staid
as a wax bride in a costume
museum (but not nearly as silly),
resembling porcelain
more than life, ambrosia
to a bee sick of gorse, mullein,
surely it ought to ravish
our souls, make us dream love
bloom-fresh, unscarred, intact.

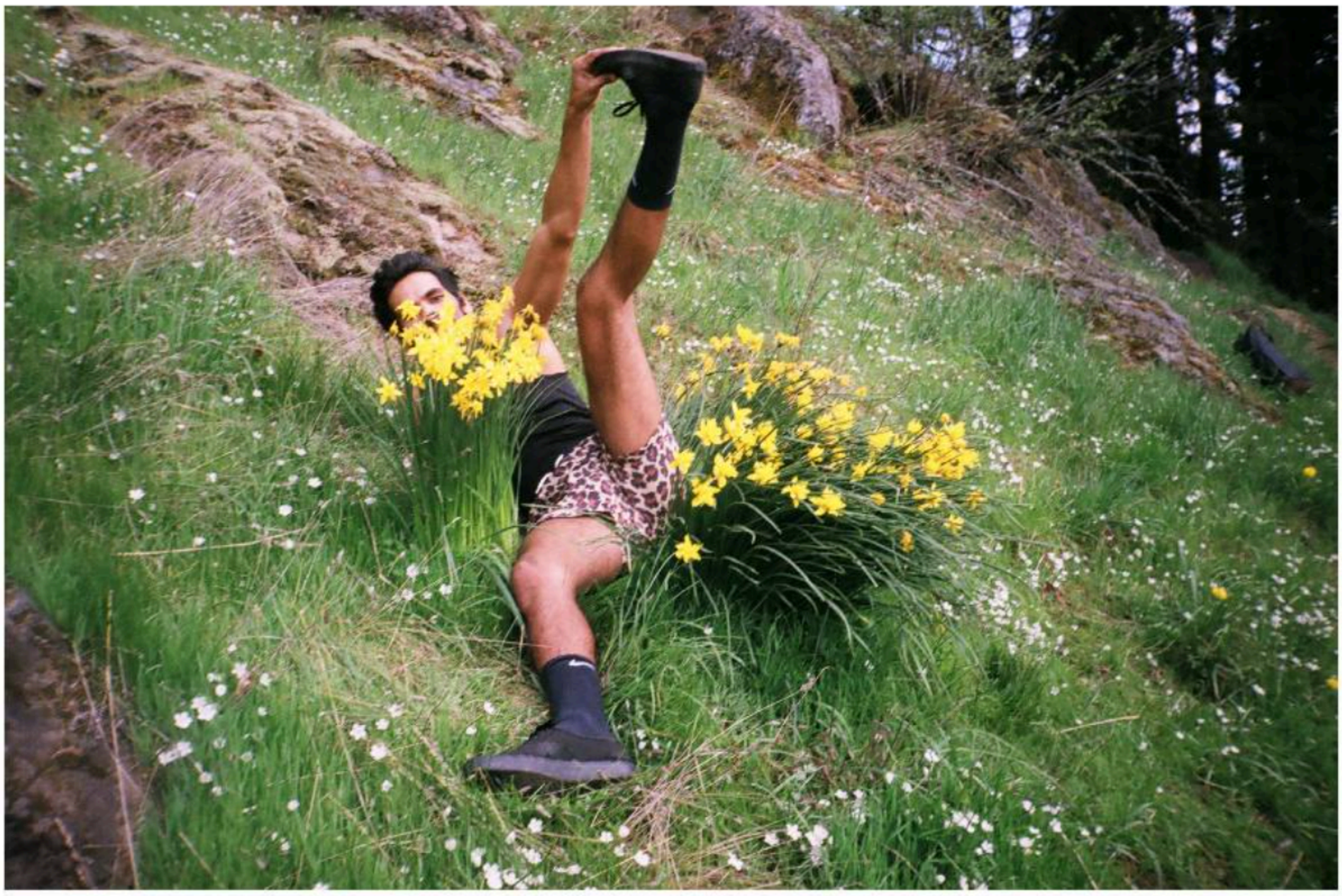
But two perfect holes
in two once-perfect petals
make it look, in fact,
as though a paper punch
had lunch (or snacked)
on its cream-lush flesh.
How this marred beauty nettles!,
tells us one of life's small truths,
dear: worms have sweet tooths

too. Remember the Adonises
we knew years back, flaunting
their fettles, kissable, strong?
Scads lovelier than we, they dazzled
like flowers--so young, miraculous,
for an hour with one we'd have
done inadmissible things. And to
think: the ones who aren't worm dung
are moth bait, rags like us.

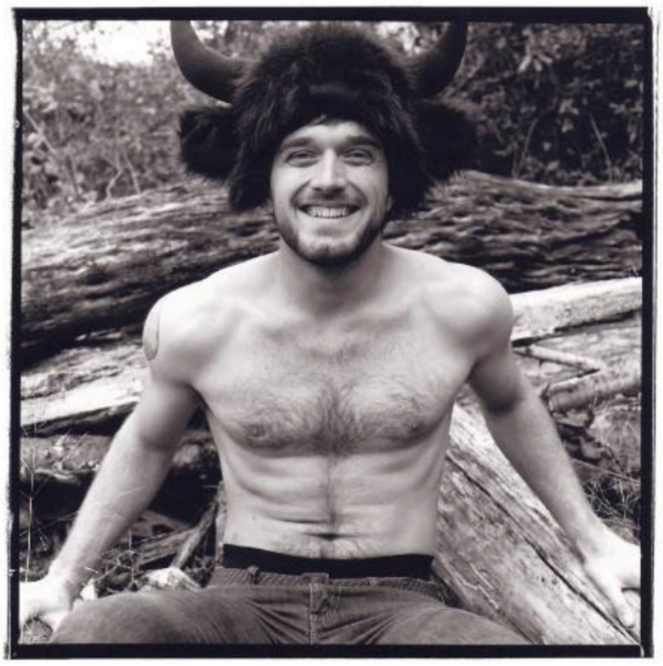
*—James Kangas*

*Published in The Windless Orchard #59, Spring 1995*





*Top: "In the Yellow Bush"; Bottom: "Holes". Photographs by Chris Moody.*



*Photographs by Gavin Geoffrey Dillard.*

God exists because we do.
No god exists outside of our own
self.

Blasphemy, you say? Nay,
blasphemy is believing that you are
somehow separate from That.

Blasphemy is letting your
intellect rule your heart.
Blasphemy is wearing a hat and

sun-glasses on a perfect
sunny day.
Blasphemy is calling an animal

stupid or telling a tree it is
in the way.
Blasphemy is thinking the earth is

yours to mold or the weather yours to
control. Blasphemy is telling any
living thing it is insignificant.

Try, try to picture God without
you—let me know how that
works out.

Your form is filled with celestial bodies of
its own, great orbs spinning and crashing out of
control around the magnetic central sun that
is your internal smile.

Your face is the veil which belies the comets and
nebulae you harbor;
but you don't fool me one iota, friend: you are
the
entirety of the universe in one, sweet, smiling

person.

Begging God for forgiveness is like
begging your lungs to breathe.
Sitting still quells the tremors of the heart;
a walk in the woods restores the soul's balance.

Life shouldn't be so hard.
It isn't: the truth is, it is your sins which
make you whole;
it is the air that breathes *you*.

And every path, through every meadow and
mire, invariably and unwaveringly leads
one, ever-so-faithfully and ever-so-
lovingly, Home.

Some things are best left un-understood.
Like God, like Love, like Truth, like
Peace, like Joy …

Why is this so?

Because some concepts require
*inner*standing in order to not be
robbed of their magic.

*—Gavin Geoffrey Dillard*

# The Haunted Pool

*by Manuel Igrejas*

In the dream, Annette Caponegro and I are shopping for used pools in a posh neighborhood where a mysterious plague has descended. Annette sniffs the air and says, "It's malaise," and we ring the doorbell of a huge Tudor. An elderly black man opens the door. He leads us down the colorless stone steps to a metal door. Silently, he opens the door and shows us a big, blue room with a big, blue pool. Dusty light peeps through tiny, barred windows. The floor of the pool is cracked into dangerous chunks and there are swirls of dirt in the dead water. Muddy footprints lead to three steps at the shallow end.

"It looks like it belongs in a loony bin," Annette says. We won't buy it.

When I wake up, I look out the window and see my neighbor, Willie Feather, out with his dogs. I've been in this building for two years and whenever I look out, day or night, I see Willie and the dogs in their slow, stately shuffle up and down Juniper Avenue. They are big dogs, one brown, and one white, almost as old as Willie. He uses a leash on them and may as well be wearing one himself, they are in such harmony. He is a tall, white on white man, with the profile of a silent movie star and he always wears a bowler.

I've seen him in animated conversations with other elderly people on the street, but he has never acknowledged me. He and the girls always look straight ahead, snouts in the air, every crack and swell of the pavement familiar to their tread. The dogs' names are Tanya and Lorraine. It is late February and Willie has re-fashioned two of his old gray sweaters as vests for them. Willie is, nominally, the super in my building, but I've always felt he is not to be approached for any reason.

Tanya, the brown one, lags behind. Willie and Lorraine, without looking back, wait for her.

Why Annette Caponegro? She's organizing my high school's reunion, according to the email I got. Maybe the rest of my graduating class is unemployed and broke too. If they are, why would I want to hang out with them? I'm hanging by a thread, making spare change as a bartender for different caterers. I'm fast and dependable. But with the recession, business is down so instead of a few gigs a week, I'm averaging one or two a month.

Chateau Arbogast on Cedar Boulevard is part chateau, part palazzo, part fortress.

Its gleaming mock limestone exterior combines columns, cherubs, gargoyles, wood beams and turrets. Frosted gold mirrors line the halls, and white spiral staircases lead to upstairs and downstairs rooms. The banquet rooms are all color coded. The Gold Room is the biggest and most expensive and that is where I'll be working tonight.

The Gold Room is abuzz in preparation for a Bat Mitzvah a few hours away. Courtney Ortner is thirteen years old and one hundred or so of her relatives and closest friends will be there to wish her well. Murray Arbogast has recruited his team A team for this party. Pearl, Dora, and Connie are tough women in their sixties who started with Murray when he worked out of his garage. There is a sassy bunch of hard-working college kids and a sprinkling of people in their thirties including me, my friend Jane and Murray's son, Shelly.

"Good afternoon, Frank. You're late, Frank. Get to work, Frank. How are you, Frank?" Murray says.

Murray hobbles from one end of the room to the other, snarling at the help and cooing at the host, Harvey Ortner, who has come early to make sure everything is just right for his little princess.

Murray is in his sixties, has a bad heart, high blood pressure, a hernia, and fallen arches, making him list to all sides at once. He has eczema and psoriasis too, the combination of ills pulling his face into a long unhappy garlic pickle. He still has dark wavy hair and sports a natty mustache. His small, quick eyes flicker across the busy room and a string of helpless demands —light those candles! wipe those plates! fold those napkins! exhausts him. He catches his breath, and we see the sad, surprising smile of a shy boy and realize that he loves it all.

The florist's staff, four slender, giggling young men dressed in black jump suits, trots in with vase after vase filled with giant, mutant pink roses. The ridiculous garish roses and the boys' high spirits brighten the room considerably while sleet batters the windows.

We pull together four rickety curved tables called serpentines and make a circle in the center of the room. Three of the tables will be for the hot and cold buffet and one will be a bar. Connie and Jane, our ace table skirters, artfully cover the splintery tables with yards of pleated pink cloth.

I give Pearl a diet soda. She is a tall, fierce blonde woman in her sixties, the anchor of Murray's staff. Her husband attempted suicide five times and is now permanently institutionalized. This job is her life. She and Murray bicker constantly like tired children, Pearl second guessing his every command. "Water in the water goblets? Murray, are you out of your mind?" "I'm so glad to see you tonight, sweetie. Thank God we got good people here," Pearl says, one eye out for Murray. Then she spots him.

"Murray! If you put the ice mold out now, you'll have a puddle by cocktail hour!" In a moment she is at Murray's side. She'd like to be the next Mrs. Murray Arbogast, conditions permitting, and Murray is sadly, mopily, free now. He was dumped by the glamorous Rita after thirty years of marriage, something the older ladies swear they saw coming.

Murray directs the Haitian busboys as they set up white screens that separate the cocktail room from the dining room. When they are done, the florist's boys attack the screens with more roses, greenery, and staple guns. Suddenly it's May in the Gold Room. I don't want the flower boys to leave and wonder if I can grab a stapler, pretend to be one of them and slip out to the van. I would invite them to my place, where I could examine their pretty faces and bodies and create interesting fauna arrangements for the five of us on this dreary day.

I cut lemons, limes and oranges in the enormous kitchen which is filled with people working noisily. The head chef, Aldo, has arranged that all the waitresses give him a kiss when they arrive. He works in a pinch and squeeze as well. Aldo is very talented and very temperamental, and everyone tries to stay on his good side if only to avoid his high-pitched, unintelligible temper tantrums. He once threw a meat cleaver at a waiter. Aldo is a solid slab of a man with a fat Roman head. He looks amazingly like Gertrude Stein in the Forties. Jane consults with him about the menu and is pulled into his embrace as he runs his hands all over her.

"You're too skinny. You leave that husband and come to Aldo. I'll fatten you up," he says.

Released, Jane comes to me. "Not only do I get mauled, but then he complains about the merchandise," she says. Jane and I are chums. She went to Bennington, had a career in fashion before she married her high school sweetheart and had two kids. She has a big house in Upper Cedar Chips which she may lose unless her husband straightens up. He was a Wall Street whiz who started unraveling before the market did. I think it's crystal meth, but Jane won't say for sure.

I set up the bar for Shelly and me, knowing he will breeze in a half hour before show time. I don't mind because I like Shelly and would rather work with him than any other bartender. I saw him late last night in an Advil commercial and a few years ago he was in three episodes of *Sex and the City*. Shelly is small and wiry with thinning blond hair and big, green eyes. He was getting a lot of television work for a while, but something happened and now he's working with Murray and not too happy about it. Shelly and Murray manage one shouting match per party.

The room is ready and it's dinner time for the staff. We line up in the kitchen and Aldo ladles out spaghetti with meat sauce from a big pot into our outstretched plates.

Mixed vegetables are doled out by the sous chefs who are all Hispanic. They started with Murray as busboys and cleanup. A wave of Albanians filled the support positions for a while but they're being moved out by a knot of small, industrious Haitians who keep to themselves. I surreptitiously make drinks for anyone who wants one, to Murray's mock distress. Every few weeks he goes on the war path about drinking on the job, something he does himself. I always drink when I work, and I make Murray his martinis. I have a couple of gin and tonics with dinner and will have a few more before the party starts. I will have a nice buzz by cocktail hour and be very loose during the main course. The few times I tried to work without drinking, my hands shook; I saw too much.

We are all sprawled around the kitchen eating our dinner, some people sitting on milk crates, on work counters. Aldo saves a plate for Jane who is calling her children to say good night. We all worked the night before, so everyone is a little subdued, saving up energy for show time. The only one talking is Dora, a sweet-faced grandma who's built like a bull. We sit politely and pretend to listen to her tale of TV watching. It's soothing to sit together like this and listen to Grandma ramble. As I look at the tired faces sprawled around the kitchen I think, God, I love these people.

"Hello darlings!" Shelly says holding open the kitchen's swinging door.

"Shelly!" everybody says at once.

Murray pops his head through the door. "Let's go, people. Ice up!" We dump our plates and file out.

Shelly says, "Remember, people —talcum powder in the chafing dishes and don't forget to French the host." Shelly and I stand behind our bar and fill glasses with ice in preparation for the rush. We make each other stiff cocktails and toast. "Fuck everybody. All the time." "Murray hasn't been around to lecture you yet," I say.

"Oh, he nabbed me on the way in. We got our fifteen rounds out of the way early today," Shelly says.

The golden doors open and our circle of food and drink, like a wagon train braced for attack, is assaulted from all sides. In one corner, a tuxedoed man plays "Begin the Beguine" on a synthesizer. Two elderly violinists pick likely targets and serenade them as they sit at lace-covered tables. A line of kids snakes around a caricaturist in another corner and a robot trundles around the room making metallic wisecracks. And there is a film crew.

For the first fifteen minutes, Shelly and I are too busy to talk, our arms flying in different directions. The waitresses drop off hors d'oeuvre for us and we stash them behind the bar.

Harvey Ortner, our host, struts around the room, like a pigeon with a perm. He flashes a lot of gold and might be wearing a button that says: I'm successful! He's a doctor, some kind of specialist. On his arm is a young woman made up like a Cosmo cover girl with wild dark hair and bright, baby doll lips. She is Courtney Ortner, the birthday girl. Her mauve sequined gown is slit up the side and she doesn't totter at all in spiky heels. Harvey and Courtney work the room, arms around each other.

"That looks healthy," Shelly says, nodding at the couple. "What's this guy's name, Humbert Ortner?" "Maybe the mother's dead," I say.

"By her own hand," Shelly says. "There's trouble afoot." "I saw you on the tube last night, stardust. You had a headache, and you took Advil." He furrows his brow and rubs his temples. Just like in the commercial.

"And now I'm working on another one." Shelly knocks back a big gulp of Grey Goose.

"Are you auditioning a lot?" I ask. Like all of Murray's staff, our interaction is hot, fast, and intimate living only inside these gaudy walls. This actor who has stood next to Sarah Jessica Parker, that grandmother in a uniform and orthopedic shoes and me, a man downsized from this dead-end marketing job, have all been beamed down to this strange planet, the planet Mitzvah. This is ground zero for all of us. Snatched away from our real lives and freed from their constraints, we are more ourselves. Lost, we have nothing to lose.

"I hit the wall," Shelly says glumly.

Shelly says Murray's parties are like something David Lynch burped up and if he's in a wicked mood, he likes to narrate them. Tonight, he looks like his demons are snapping at his rear end.

The film crew shines bright lights on us, caught in the act of working. I never know what to do when this happens. Shelly takes three of our stashed kreplach and juggles them for the camera.

"Shelly!" Murray shouts at my elbow and I jump. Shelly waves him away and we make another round of drinks for ourselves. I do this routine where I make three drinks at once, holding three glasses in one hand, I pour vodka from a bottle higher than my head. I don't spill a drop, but my elbow knocks over a bottle of Galliano which Shelly catches.

An old man, chewing chopped liver and crackers asks us for something. White room? Washroom? "Weisman? No, the Weisman party is down the hall, second door to the left," Shelly says. "Can't miss it." "A comedian," the old man says. "I said White Russian. Now I got a joke for you boys. What do you get when you mix —damn! I forgot! Oh, I got it. What do you get when you mix milk and vodka?" "Nausea?" Shelly says.

"I blew it. Wait. Okay. What do you get when you mix vodka, orange juice and milk of magnesia? "Shoot." "A Phillips Screwdriver!" The robot comes to the bar and asks for tranny fluid. "Can I have your phone number, big boy?" it asks.

"Beechwood 4-5789," Shelly says.

"Not you. HIM." The robot wheels around to me.

I follow the cord to a little man in his thirties with thinning dark hair and a scraggly goatee holding the controls, talking into a box. He waves at me. I wave back and shake my head.

"Yeow!" Backing up, the robot runs over the foot of a woman holding out an empty glass.

"Are you okay?" Shelly asks her.

"Nothing a double scotch on the rocks wouldn't cure." She is rosy-cheeked and healthy looking, as if she's run to the party in her white linen suit and high heels. Her long dark hair is streaked with gray, and her fine-featured face is tired and intelligent. As she takes her drink from Shelly, their eyes lock, and I see the current run between them.

She walks away slowly, twirling her rocks with a straw. Shelly looks at me and I beat him to the punch.

"Yes, I saw that." I polish off another drink. "Did you have a Bar Mitzvah?" "Oh yeah. Murray and Rita pulled out all the stops. They dressed me up in a black cowboy outfit and trotted me out on a little horsey —which I didn't get to keep. I look at the pictures now and then when I'm feeling suicidal, you know, to build the case against life." "How is your mother?" "Oh, Rita just loves being single. She's dating and there's a million trendy things to do in Miami nowadays. I stopped and saw her on my way back here. She thinks I should settle down in Miami. She says it's the new Hollywood. 'Everywhere you go, a movie star." She asked me about Murray once." "Murray's starting to bounce back. It must be worse to get dumped when you're older." "Oh, who can tell with him," Shelly says. "He was always a sad sack." "Well, I like your father. He's always been decent to me." Gazing into the crowd, I see a familiar face, a face from my real life. It's Albert Azzopardi. We went to high school together and I never liked him. He went to college with my ex-wife and knew her as vaguely as he knew me. He's a radiologist and I bumped into him several times at the hospital when I visited my father. I've seen him five times in ten years, and he always asks the same three questions.

"Oh no," I say aloud, and Shelly asks me what's up. I tell him about the three questions. "You'll see." Albert comes to the bar and shakes my hand. "How's your wife?" he asks.

"We're divorced." "How's your father?" "He's dead." "How's the job?" "I got fired." "You going to the reunion?" "Nah." Satisfied, Albert shakes my hand again and walks away.

"Well, that was a Kodak moment," Shelly says. "And, not that I was counting, but that was four questions." The synthesizer player asks for a drink. It's Jackie Jay, who heads the Chateau's house band, The Aspirations. He's a gray-faced man with sparkling caps and a curly black rug.

"The usual, Shel. Things a little slow in Hollywood?" Jackie says "We're out of Geritol," Shelly says.

"Absolut, on the rocks, smartie pants. Does Spielberg have your number in Jersey?" "The wig looks fluffy today, Jackie. Did you wash it in Woolite?" "There's no business like show business, Shel." "It's like no business *you* know," Shelly says.

Jackie takes a five out of his wallet and lays it on the bar. "Anything I can do to help?" "Yeah. Fuck off." When Jackie walks away, Shelly pockets the five.

He scans the party, his eyes green lasers.

"Looking for Ms. Double Scotch Rocks?" I ask.

"Yeah. She must have wandered into the wrong room." Jane comes to the bar and holds out her tray. "Kreplach, guys?" "Where were you a minute ago? I wanted to throw one at somebody. I can bean him from here," Shelly says.

Ms. Scotch Rocks appears at the bar and holds out her glass. "You guys having fun?" "Yes," I say.

"No," Shelly says.

"Yes and no," we say together.

"Cute," she says.

"What's a nice woman like you doing in a place like this?" Shelly asks.

"I'm a friend of the groom." "Bulletin. This is a Bat Mitzvah," Shelly says.

"I know." Shelly steps out from behind the bar and leads the woman out to the lobby. The music has stopped temporarily. In the lull, my body attempts to float away from my aching feet and my mind drifts out of the room .

"Coke, please," a little voice says.

The robot handler is standing at the bar, looking raw and nervous, like a Chihuahua.

"Where's the robot?" I ask.

"He's in the van. I only use him cocktail hour. For dinner, I go around doing magic tricks, rabbit in the hat, shit like that." "Uh huh," "This, of course, is not what I want to do with my life. I'm at Bananas in Hasbrouck Heights, The Improv in Red Bank, and The Chowder Pot. Name a night, I'm somewhere. I don't waste my good stuff on gigs like this but you gotta make a living, right? I do a lot of impersonations. Not the schlock stuff. I do Pesci, DeNiro *and* Harvey Keitel. I mean, nobody else does them, right? I nod, hoping he'll go away, " I hope I didn't freak you out before, but my shrink says I should act on my feelings. I always wanted to pick up a bartender. I'll give you my card and you'll call me. I've done my part. Oh, and I do the Marx Brothers too. I even do Zeppo. Who else does Zeppo?" "Do Harpo." Shelly comes back and the little man hands me his card and scurries away.

Courtney slinks up to the bar. "Give me an Alabama Slammer," she says wearily, looking around the room.

"I'm sorry, I can't serve you. You're underage," I say.

"You're kidding, right?" "Do you have any proof?" "I don't believe this. It's in my purse, which is in the car." "Sorry, miss. It's against the law to serve minors." "Do I look like a minor?" she asks.

No. "Yes." Ms. Scotch Rocks approaches the bar.

"Mother, tell him it's okay for me to have a drink," Courtney says to her.

"Court, you heard the man." "I'm telling Daddy," Courtney says and stomps away.

Harvey appears immediately. If this woman is his wife, he doesn't acknowledge her. "I'm the host. Is there a problem here?" "Courtney asked for a drink and I told her I couldn't serve her. It's against the law," I say.

"I'm paying for this. I don't see why she can't have what she wants," Harvey says.

He's been drinking sweet, sticky Melon Balls and his face is flushed.

"Harvey—" Ms. Scotch Rocks interjects.

"Mindy, I will handle this. You just keep drinking." "The thing is," I say, sounding more reasonable than I feel," we could lose our liquor license." "Yeah, yeah. What did she order?" "An Alabama Slammer." "Is there a law that says *I* can't have an Alabama Slammer?" Harvey says.

"No sir." He's puffed with pride as I hand him the drink. He looks at the glass in Mindy's hand. "We need you for pictures," he says.

Mindy downs her drink and follows Harvey out to the lobby.

Murray is suddenly at my side. "Thank you, Frank." He squeezes my arm.

"The customer's always right?" I say.

"Fuck him," Murray says and hobbles away.

"I have her number at the office," Shelly says.

"We're talking about Mindy, Mrs. Ortner, I take it." "Yeah. She's in advertising." "Sounds like your type. Married with connections. Doesn't it get a little tiring? All the complications?" "Never," Shelly says with wounded glee. "Do you ever get tired of being gay?" "Sometimes." The cocktail hour is over. It's time to break down the bar and set up little rolling bars which we're supposed to wheel from table to table. The Haitians remove the trellises and the guests trickle into the dining room to find their tables. The fully assembled Aspirations are playing the "One Note Samba." Next to them, a very young DJ has set up his equipment. At the far end of the dining room is the head or "kiddy" table which tonight is filing up with coltish, giggling young women dressed as glamorously as Courtney. They all are texting or tweeting. Easels bearing posters of Courtney posing in a variety of outfits are mounted behind the head table. They look like fashion layouts and there is one startling shot of Courtney rising from the surf, topless, her arms across her budding chest. I wonder if Courtney is really a model or is this the Ortner's version of Shelly's pony? Shelly and I roll our squeaky bars to either side of the room and work the tables.

Shelly has the host table. I notice that there don't seem to be the usual grandmas and grandpas scattered around the room. There is only one table filled with old people.

Instead, there is an assortment of men and women in their forties who don't look alike.

Seated next to Mindy is a tall black woman in a brown tunic and knee-high black boots.

Her spiky hair is two-toned, red, and black. She whispers something hilarious in Mindy's ear with a cupped hand. When she turns, I see her mustache and goatee. The film crew goes from table to table interviewing the guests and there is a still photographer.

Whatever their problems, the Ortners are a very camera-ready clan, exuding family values in every frame.

"Begging your kind indulgence, ladies and gentlemen. Begging your kind indulgence," Murray says into the mike and the room hushes for the candle lighting ceremony. Tante Rose lights her candle and rests one hand on the cake for support. She grabs the microphone to make a speech and smothers it in pink frosting. Uncle Sid wipes her hand as Rose says, "As matriarch of the family..." "Who died and left her matriarch?" a woman says on my side of the room. Rose doesn't hear her. Sid grabs the mike from Rose, then Harvey takes it from him and thanks them both. Jackie Jay grabs the mike from Harvey and says, "Moving right along..." An enormous man has passed out in his chair before the salad is served. His tiny, red-faced wife flutters around him trying to rouse him. Twenty doctors attend him and pronounce him asleep. Four Haitians carry him to his car, chair, and all, as his tearful wife is led out by Jane who has her arm around her.

Jackie and the Aspirations use amplifiers to compensate for their faltering pipes.

One table near the bandstand is filled with elderly people who sit with their hands over their ears. Jackie goes table to table asking for requests and an uncle grabs the mike and says, "How much do you get not to play?" "You can't afford it, boss," is whispered throughout the room.

Jackie launches into his show-stopping version of "Rumania!" a rousing Yiddish standard he performs with great zest. He whips off his tie, sweat pours from beneath his steaming wig. The whole room claps along with him. He winds up on his knees in front of very old woman in a wheelchair who wipes tears from her eyes. She is a great grandma Ortner, and she is the reason Jackie was hired and exactly for this moment.

Shelly and I help the waitresses pick up the heavy brass service plates used during the salad course. The waitresses pile them in our arms, and we waddle to the kitchen together.

I have enough gin in me to find the rest of the party painless. Shelly spends most of his time attending to Mindy and they even dance a couple of times, which causes a buzz around the room. Murray taps Shelly on the shoulder, gets some kind of smart response and storms into the kitchen. I serve the whole room without falling down or knocking over a table.

The young deejay has taken over the entertainment portion. And he's cranked up the sound, which is killing the old people's table. He's a cute kid and many of the girls hang around him.

The robot man comes to my bar. Can I have a Diet Sprite? He takes a sip. "God, I hate these kids." "Uh huh."

"I bet I'm probably the most interesting person you've ever met." "What?" "I have to put the rabbit in the van. You want to come out with me and smoke a joint?" I have a flash of being in bed with him: a lazy bottom that just lays there and yaps all night.

"Please don't talk to me anymore," I say. And like a trouper, he disappears.

The dinner course comes out, the waitresses pour single file out of the kitchen carrying platters of prime rib, roast potatoes, asparagus. Dora looks shaky and pale under the weight of her tray and I take it from her.

"Thanks, Frankie. I'm a little under the weather tonight." A special treat! Courtney and her best friend Morgan will sing "Defying Gravity." The Aspirations back her up staying safely a few beats behind her. Their next number is "Tomorrow" and the whole room joins them for the chorus. This is too much for me and I join the waitresses running toward the kitchen. There's time for a smoke before we set up the rolling Viennese table. Several of the older women are clustered around Murray's office where he and Shelly are having a furious argument.

Pearl grabs my arm and gulps down a cream puff. "He won't be happy until he gives his father a heart attack!" she says in her hoarse whisper. Several of the older women murmur assent.

"It's not ethical!" we hear Murray say.

Murray storms out of his office and claps his hands. "People, people, let's roll!" He charges out of the kitchen and gives Jackie his cue. The Aspirations play "Wunderbar" and like a faltering wagon train, we roll out table after table loaded with the gooiest of desserts, cream pies, mousse cakes, eclairs, napoleons, ambrosia, melon balls. I come out last with the international coffee table bearing a samovar and bottles of liqueurs. Shelly should be working the table with me, but he and Mindy have disappeared.

Harvey and Murray settle the bill. I load Harvey's Lexus by myself. Courtney is in the parking lot with four other girls, swigging from a bottle of Kahlua. The Haitians appear with brooms and mops. The staff stumbles toward the exits.

I drive home with my ears ringing. All night long people have been telling me what they want and they know what they want. What do I want? To be left alone and, voila! —I am. I stumble out of the car and my pointy black loafers tap resoundingly in the pre-dawn stillness on Juniper Street. Willie, Tanya, and Lorraine stand on the corner watching me. They don't like what they see. I wave at them.

The Juniper section of Cedar Chips is the poor end of town, the wrong side of the long-gone trolley tracks. The shops in tiny Juniper Center change identity every year, housed in perversely sturdy buildings built in the flush of the Twenties. A large Pakistani family now owns the grocery store, and they've cleared out a lot of merchandise to sell every kind of lottery ticket and tabloid magazine. Next to the grocery store is an abandoned video emporium.

The aisles of the Food Fair are spacious in the early afternoon. The only people there are senior citizens who linger over a nice piece of fruit and a nice lamb chop and a few younger stragglers. I have only enough money left to buy the essentials: eggs, bananas, coffee, bread. I want to buy vitamin C, but I can't afford it. For the first time in my life I consider theft. I can slip the small bottle into my jacket pocket. I pick up the bottle and study it.

A woman comes down the aisle pushing a cart that holds, among other things, a chatty boy about four years old. The woman is around my age, pushing forty, and deathly pale. She has dark circles under her eyes, her hair is blonde and black. Time for a touch up. It is Annette Caponegro. The boy is just as pale and has the same dark circles under his eyes. He seems to be working at being so perky as he points to everything on the shelves. "What's that, Mommy? What's that?" I hold on to the vitamins as Annette approaches with dead-ahead eyes. She weighs the merits of Extra Strength Tylenol over Extra Strength Excedrin.

"What's that, Mommy?" "It's aspirin, Anthony, for the headache you give me day after day with your questions, questions, questions." Her voice is from the tomb, so filled with misery it's like a gas she releases into the atmosphere, something that would attack the nervous system first. The boy's face freezes in a bright Jack O 'Lantern smile. I put the vitamins back on the shelf.

My life has never been this still. I have time to consider the inter-connectedness of all things. Psychosis, I believe, is just around the corner. I've become a lightning rod for coincidence. I plunge

*"Camas" Photograph by Chirs Moody.*

into vivid, disturbing dreams at night, dreams within dreams, and by day, remain in their thrall. I have decided to consider my present circumstances a choice I made, a choice not to make decisions and to live the life of the mind.

I take out the garbage after midnight and as soon as the door closes behind me I realize that I left my keys inside. I am wearing a white tee shirt that is no protection against the raw night. I pace in front of the building, cursing myself. I am too polite to ring other tenants' bells at this hour. Looking up, I see all lights are out. I could ring Willie's bell. I know he has a key to my apartment, but I can't bring myself to do it. A police car slows up as it passes, makes a u-turn and another pass. I see the Big Mac in the cop's hand. I catch my reflection in the barber shop window. I look scrawny and desperate, like a fugitive. Outside my cozy apartment, so hard won, I have no context whatsoever. The Juniper landscape is so bleak and desolate that at any moment I might be visited by extraterrestrials.

I hear a growl behind me and jump. It's Tanya, with Willie and Lorraine.

I locked myself out, I think, but can't manage to say. Willie opens the door and I follow him upstairs. He wordlessly opens my door and walks away with the girls.

"Thank you very much." The timbre of my voice startles me. They are the first words I've spoken all day.

I am standing in the enormous kitchen of Miss Lola Brown, one of New Jersey's most exclusive caterers. She is the grandmother of Haywood, my oldest friend. The kitchen is painted hot pink, and you can see yourself in the stainless-steel surfaces of the ovens and refrigerators. A fragrant mist of ham and sweet potatoes fills the kitchen.

A small army of black people dressed in black and white moves steadily from the kitchen to a fleet of black vans in the parking lot.

"Grandma, this is my good buddy, Frank," Haywood says and Miss Lola nods at me giving me the once over as if I were an underdone roast. She is a tall, cream-colored woman with white hair tied in a long braid down her back. Her face is wide and handsome with enormous freckles. Her eyes are green, kindly from a distance until you are brought into her focus. She is wearing a pink apron over a gray business suit. Before she can pop me back into the oven, I pick up a box filled with steaming foil containers and bring it out to the vans.

The staff is composed of very old and very young people, and everyone seems to be related. The older people are Aunt This and Uncle That. I take one box from one aunt and another from another aunt and struggle with both boxes out of the kitchen. Haywood catches me at the door, grabs my arm and says, "Easy, baby. No need to be too white." Haywood takes a crew to another small party, and I am left behind with these polite, unfriendly people. Miss Lola gets into a silver Volvo, the rest of us pile into the vans. Uncle George drives our van and Aunt Rita, Aunt Cissy and Aunt Jewel take the available seats. I sit in the back on an ice chest. We don't drive very far. The house is a tall Tudor, smothered in ivy. The aunts and uncles get into some serious family gossip as we unload the vans, joining the procession of cousins marching into the house. The kitchen is cavernous and in need of a paint job. An inch of potent coffee is left in a still glowing coffee maker. Uncle George switches it off. Breakfast dishes fill the sink.

Uncle George tells me to set up my bar in the solarium and points through rooms to a square of sunlight. He takes over a beautiful, sweeping white marble bar in a large room with a baby grand piano in it. The aunts and cousins set up tables with food in this room and another large room next to it. Uncle Clarence finds a fully stocked bar tucked under a staircase and sets himself up there. I walk through the dining room which has ancient, floral wallpaper and a spangly new chandelier. There is a large, scarred oak table and new black director's chairs around it. I pass the living room, or is it the rumpus room, which is filled with the latest technology, a complicated sound system, wide screen TV and a couple of bean bag chairs. I've never been in a house this big and imagine that its occupants do most of their living upstairs.

The solarium is set up like a museum with African sculpture everywhere. Tall bronze warriors stand in each corner, smaller pieces of mahogany mothers folded over nursing babies stand on pedestals. There are tribal shields on the walls. In the center of the room is a block of black stone that churns with cramped, vaguely human shapes struggling to burst free. Alongside, is a small black shapeless piece which I assume to be an elegant little coda or punctuation mark. I study the big piece, then study the small piece and realize it is something the German Shepherd left behind. I dispose of it.

The solarium opens onto a patio filled with old furniture, bicycles, and newspapers.

I set up my bar on a folding table. Two pretty girls arrive in a flurry of apologies and kisses. They are the twins, Laurette and Suzette, Haywood's cousins, whom I've met at his place. One's at Vassar and the other's at Sarah Lawrence, I think. Uncle George walks with his arms around both of them and they wave at me.

Uncle George comes to my bar.

"How you doing, young man?" he says.

"Fine, sir." "You know what you're doing, I see. Good, good." He is full-bodied, and has kind, hazy, crinkly eyes. "Haywood said you was experienced." He pulls out a corkscrew and helps me open some bottles of Pouilly Fuisse.

"This is some house, wouldn't you say? I expect you saw the pool." "No, sir." "Go on and look. It's down the hall. There's a stairway on the right. Go on and look," Uncle George says.

I follow his directions and find the door. I open it and look down at the pale blue walls. I smell mold and neglect and close the door.

"Go on down. It's something to see," Uncle George says, suddenly at my shoulder. I don't want to see the pool. Uncle George opens the door and gently nudges me forward. I walk down the concrete steps. Uncle George closes the door behind me. I walk into a big, blue room filled with a big blue pool. It is the pool of my dream, the same shade of blue, the same cracks in the bottom, the swirls of dirt. An inflatable sea horse floats upside down and a pair of flip flops sit on the first steps leading into the water.

The room is filled with the echo of my careful steps. Alone with the pool, I am overtaken by a great rush of feeling, not fear, but a cold, unreasonable sadness. I hear the murmur of voices and start until I realize they are coming from upstairs. I want them to be the ghosts of this desolate pool. I cannot imagine the sound of children splashing, despite the upside-down sea horse, but instead a solitary soul humming something mindless to ward off the dankness I feel. This is the scene of a crime, I think. Not something bloody and obvious, but an injustice to one heart. It is the malaise. There may have been sparkling conversation at the dinner table, martinis poured at the marble bar, but someone stubborn and sad chose to float, humming, in the blue pool at the mercy of his or her demons.

The air is close and holds me in place. I cannot move. I will not move. The party will begin upstairs. I'll hear laughter and the clump of dancing feet, and I'll remain in this moldy room. After a moment's wonder, no one will care. "The white guy? I haven't seen him." Whatever entity guided me here, through dream and chance, has been successful. I know what it wants me to know.

There is a clattering on the steps. It's Laurette and Suzette.

"I told you there was a pool," Laurette says.

"I knew that because Grandma told me," Suzette says.

They cluster around me, reluctant to go any further.

"I wish we brought bathing suits," Laurette says.

"I wouldn't swim here. This pool gives me the creeps," Suzette says.

This startles a smile out of me. We all say yeah — and run up the stairs.

`I make myself a drink and watch a string quartet plink and saw themselves into tune. They are four thin blonde women with bouffant hairdos: They look like Goldie Hawn in *Laugh In.* They are circled around the black stone as if they mean to summon its trapped forms to life. Through the window, I see limos pulling into the driveway. It's a wedding.

All the guests I can see are black. As they trickle into the house, some peep into the solarium, spot me and The Goldie Hawns and head in the other direction. One of the guests approaches me with a silly grin. It's Haywood.

"What's the matter?" he says. Haywood says my face is an open book and he'd memorize it, but there are too many lines.

"Remember that dream I told you about?" I say.

"You're always telling me about some dream." "The one about the pool? I just saw that pool. It's in the basement," I say.

"Stop!" Haywood says. "Look at this." He shows me a goose-bumpy arm. "Just stop it. Why do you have to take everything and go left with it? Just have a drink and chill out." He pours himself a tall, neat bourbon. "Are you okay?" "Yeah. I'm great." "I'll talk to you later," he says and heads back to the other party.

The party has officially begun but all the action is in the other rooms. This doesn't stop The Goldies, though I can barely hear their thin music over the hubbub. I see a deejay setting up in the next room.

A tiny woman hobbles in my direction. She is wearing a shiny green floral print dress, a black beret and sneakers.

"Scotch neat," she says. Her voice is smooth and melodious. She pats her heart.

"I would dearly love a place to sit down. In this whole big house there is no chair for an old woman." I get her a folding chair from the patio.

"Oh, thank you so much. I'm eighty-six years old and my legs can only hold out for so long. If only I could get away from all this loud music." She sits swinging her legs which don't reach the floor. She holds out her glass. "One more and I'll be in good shape." A few more people trickle to my bar and then I get busy. When I look at the chair again, it is empty. A few minutes later I see the little woman at the other end of the room. She is surrounded by young men and seems very perky. One of the young men kisses her on the cheek and she pretends to faint and fans herself. She comes to the bar surrounded by her young admirers. I have her drink ready.

"What is that?" she says.

"Scotch." "Are you trying to kill me? All I want is orange juice. I never touch that mess.

You must be thinking of my sister." She is wearing the same dress but with a kind of crushed white hat. "We're eighty four years old and different as night and day. She's an old lady and I'm a young pup." "She said she was eighty-six," I say.

""Oh, she don't know what she is." The string quartet has disappeared. The DJ's mix is blasting throughout the house. The dance floor is packed. People only step into the solarium for a breath of air. There are no corny speeches at this party, no toasts, none of the rituals of the hundreds of weddings I've worked. This is just a big, wild party. The bride is strutting on the dance floor, still wearing her veil. She is a tall, slender, light-skinned woman with a long, serious face. Her husband is short, round, and dark.

I imagine that Uncle George and Uncle Clarence must be swamped so I make my way to their bars to help them out. I try to squeeze through the dancers and meet Aunt Sue and Aunt Rita who are carrying pans of food, trying to get to the buffet line on the other side of the room. I take the pans and hold them high over my head as the Aunts hold onto my vest. "Coming through! Hot stuff!" We reach the buffet line intact and Laurette and Suzette take the pans. Miss Lola is slicing a big, fragrant ham.

"Would you like some food, dear?" she asks.

"No thanks, Ma'am. I want to see if Un —if George and Clarence need help." "Well, I'll make you a plate. You tell George and Clarence to come and eat." The uncles are gasping together at the marble bar. In the lull, we incorporate my bar into Uncle George's, restocking for the next rush. I get to work the marble bar while George and Clarence eat their dinner. Everyone at this party is very well dressed and pulled together. I see a TV anchorwoman, a state senator, a mayor, a famous singer, a boxer. Laurette comes to get drinks for the staff. The bride runs up, grabs a cocktail napkin and blots her glistening face. She asks for a mimosa.

"You're still wearing that veil?" I say.

"I figure how many times in my life am I gonna get to wear this drag? It makes me feel so glamorous," she says.

"Frank, this is Diandra," Laurette says. Diandra slumps against the bar. Up close she looks familiar. I think she's a reporter on Eyewitness News or WPIX.

I hand her the mimosa. "Tired?" "Yeah, but this is my party and I'm gonna dance my ass off." "At least you have the pool to cool off," Laurette says.

Diandra makes a face. "Lord, no. Nobody uses it. I've only been in it once and it gave me the willies. That thing's haunted." I want to hear more about the pool but the groom calls and Diandra runs to him in big, slow-motion steps. The uncles and aunts take their time eating and I enjoy being alone behind the beautiful bar. I keep thinking I've seen another white man at this party and then I do see him as he approaches the bar. He is thirtyish, thin with a sharp, feral face and dark hair. He is wearing a grayish sharkskin suit and a greasy red tie, or is it a leather tie? The way he says hello to me says, hey, we're white, we're hip, we're here.

"A lot of heavy-duty people here tonight," he says. "The big guys." He rattles off a list of jazz names. "You like jazz?" "I don't know it." Diandra's father, Ray Sampson, is a famous bass player, he tells me. This guy's name is Chuck. He's a guitarist who tours with Ray. "The best thing that ever happened to me." I want to ask him if he was ever married to Annette Caponegro. It would round out the case I'm making for coincidence and fate. I want to believe there are higher powers who care enough to direct us to our marks in the scheme of things. I dreamt of the blue pool and then I saw the blue pool and if there is nothing else to make of it then the experience hangs there, merely experienced. The union of Chuck and Annette would suggest that I was meant to know something, some dark, universal truth available only to a privileged few. Otherwise, I am just a poor, imaginative soul drifting through life with no direction. Maybe I have asked Chuck about Annette, but he won't answer the question. Yes, that's it. I ask him, but he won't answer me.

He slips me a five and a joint.

"It's potent weed," he says and is gone.

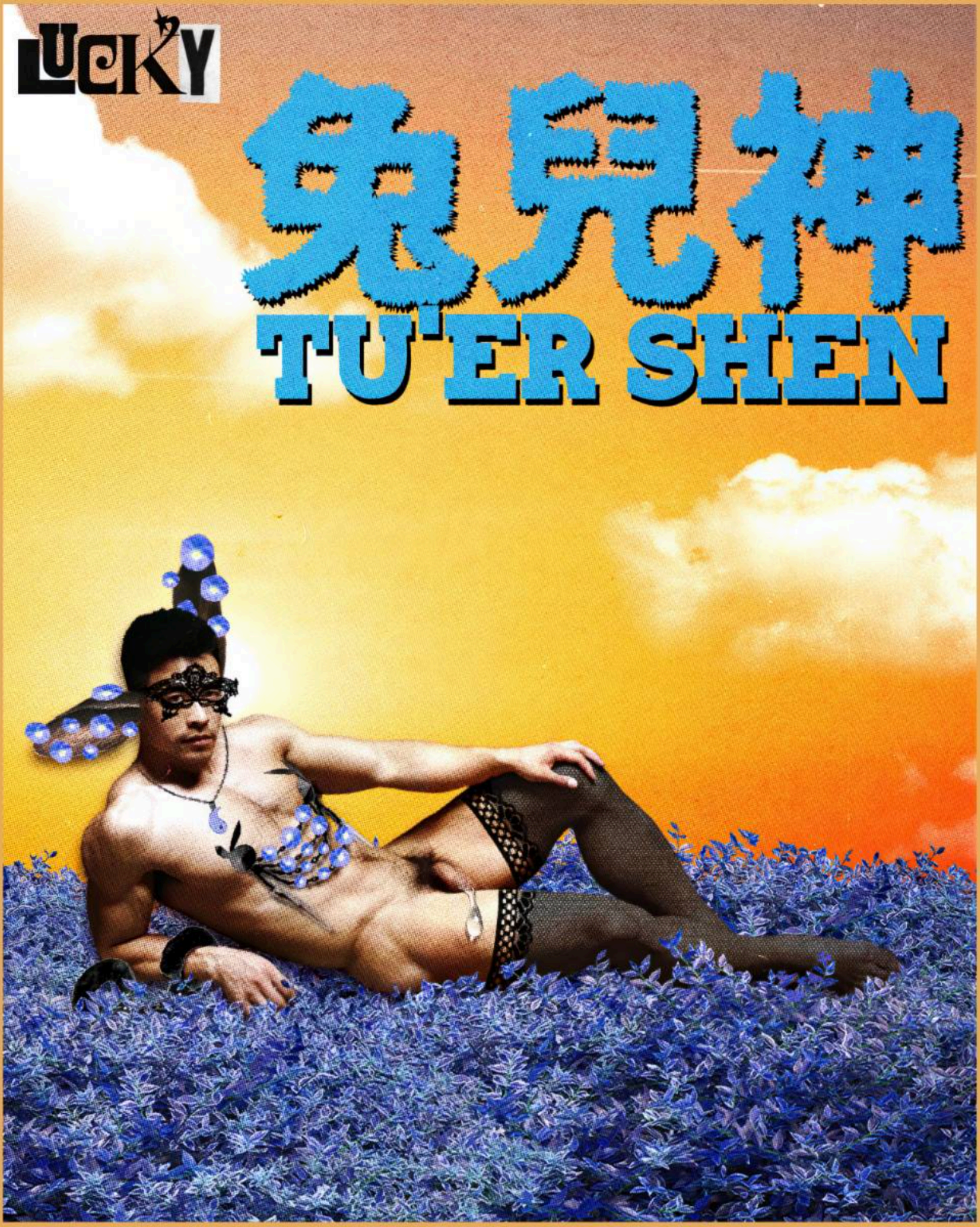
I smoke the joint on the way home and feel a sudden pang of longing, not for anyone in particular but for longing itself.

Willie and the hounds are on the corner as I head toward the building. Tonight, they are wearing bright green vests, like harbingers of spring. I decide to cross the street and talk to them. They don't move, nor express any interest whatsoever. I picture myself in their sights: a tall, tapping, wobbling penguin. I don't care.

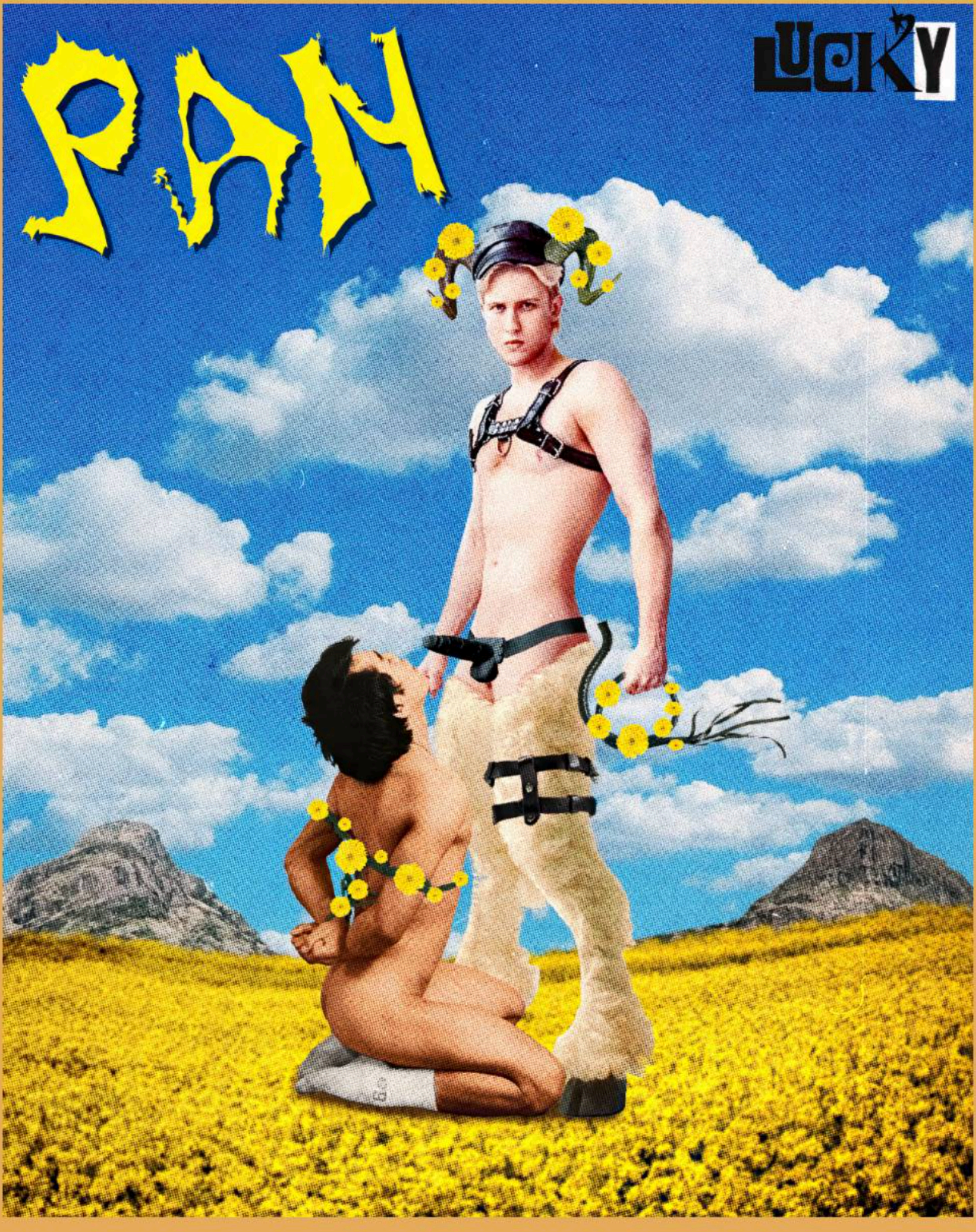
"Hello, ladies," I say, patting their stiff heads. Willie eyes me stonily. "They're real beauties. How old are they?" Tanya looks to Lorraine and together they look up at Willie and nod. I step back.

Willie slowly raises a big hand and with one gnarled finger beckons me closer. He points to my left hand and I look at it. Give it to me, the finger says. I offer Willie my hand, palm side up. He kisses it.

*"Nectar of Man" by Shannon Hedges. Mixed Media on MM Paper.*


LUCKY
兎兒神
TU'ER SHEN

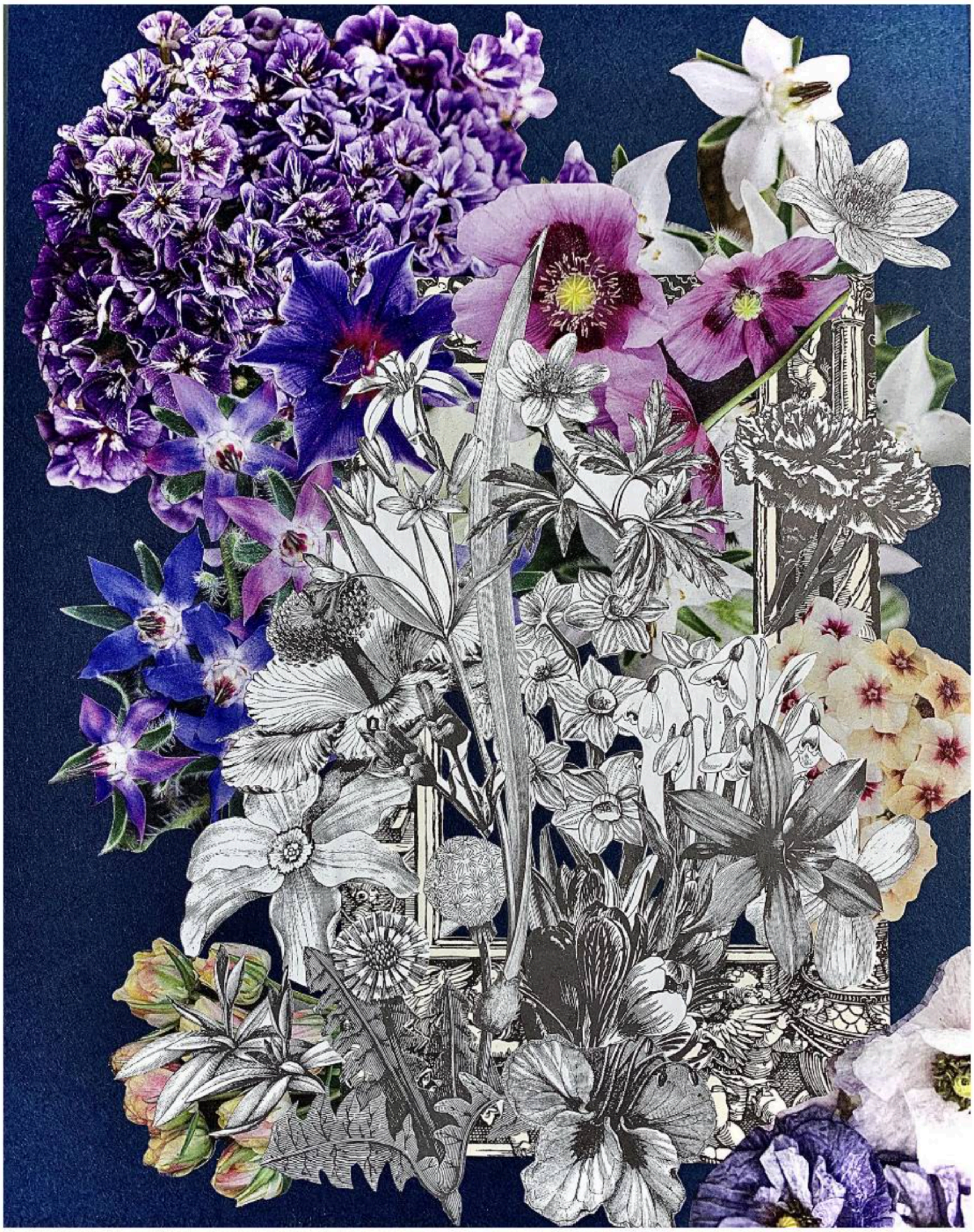
*"Tu'er Shen" by Lucky Soul. Chinese God of Male lovers and sex, associated with Rabbits.*



*"Pan" by Lucky Soul. Greek Rustic God of Nature, taught humanity masturbation.*

*"A Cosmic Touch" by Chris Moody*

*Top: "She Is a Flower"; Bottom: "Happy Hugs". Photographs by Chris Moody.*



*"Weeding the Garden" by CrowDog.*

# A Field of Weeds

You taught me the futility
of love, love’s field
of weeds, the reason
lovers labor
at their grief
beneath the stars, false lovers cruelty
beneath the stars
because of grief. Fireflies flicker
in the moonlit field, but not
for us. For love can’t help
who can’t be helped
beneath a bright full moon.

Just
in jeans, a wreath
of weeping willow tangled
in your hair, your long blond tendrils
of luminous hair, you wash the air
with fragrances
of freshest lilac, lily
of the valley, white carnations not
for us.

Oh, if I could, I’d make you over love’s own image,
lilies, fireflies, starlight not
for us. I’d make you over
in that field
of weeds.

*—Ken Anderson*

# the color of spring

me upstairs playing
five years old
Mommy yells my name
“what did I do wrong this time?”
I ignore her
she yells again
I go down

she’s in the den
kneeling on the couch
a circle on the frosted window
wiped away
she wipes a lower patch for me
I climb up
kneel and look out

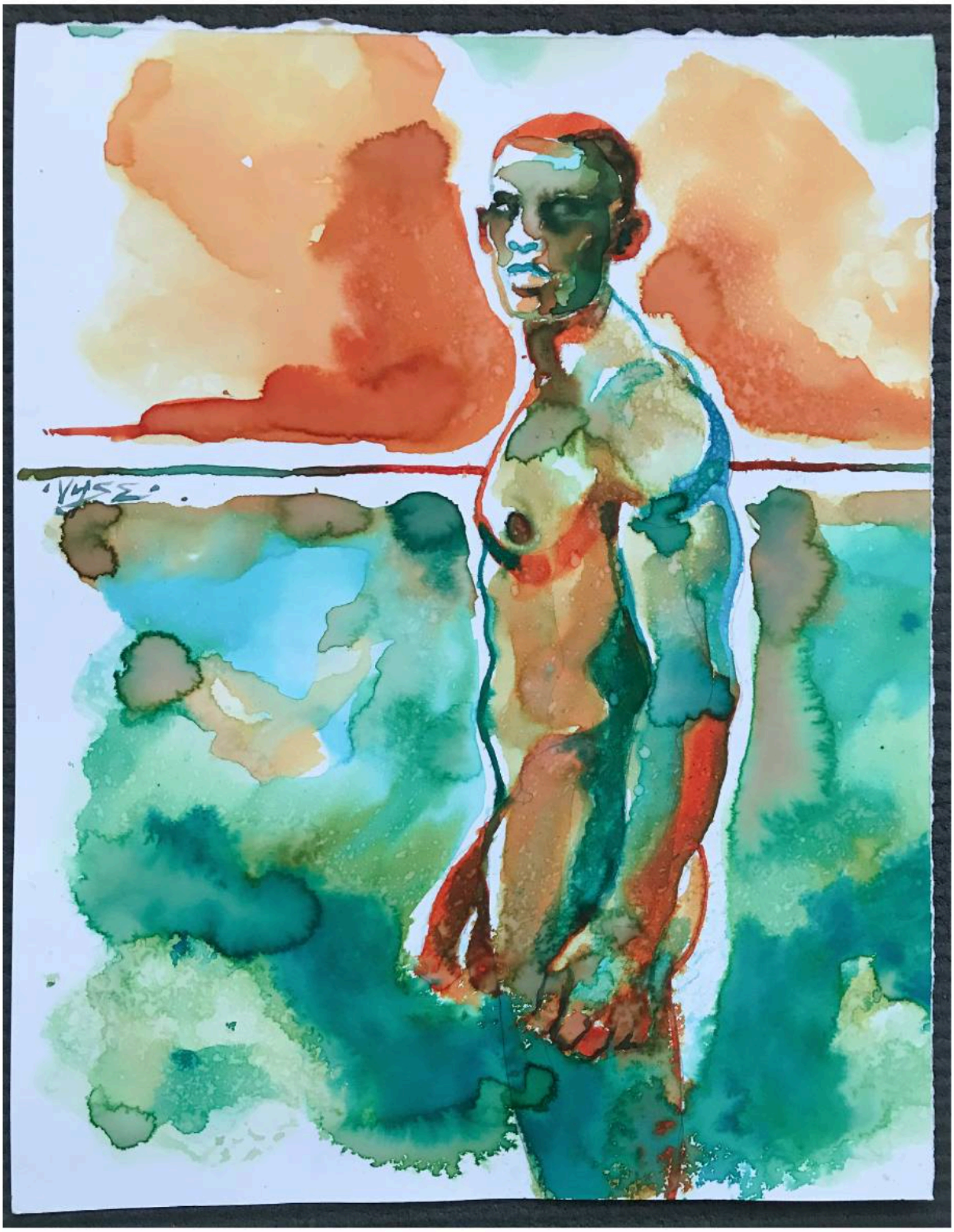
pipping up through the snow
a single yellow bud

“it’s a crocus”
“a what?”
five months out of the city
in our very first house

me still smiling
almost seventy years later
spring
is yellow golden

*—eli andrew ramer*

*Prior two pages: "Faerie Soiree" by Oscar Zamora Graves. Photo paper, construction paper, glitter, and glass cabochons.*



*"Spring Awaiting" by Richard Vyse.*

*"New Growth" by Chris Moody.*

# Cherry Trees Are Blooming Again

*Loveliest of trees, the cherry now*
*Is hung with bloom along the bough,*
*And stands about the woodland ride*
*Wearing white for Eastertide. – A. E. HOUSMAN*

We see you got the word again:
Our planet's heating up. We're partly to blame
(entirely to blame for the withering heat of our wars).
We hardly deserve another efflorescence
as breathtaking, inexplicable as you.

But here you are everywhere anyway:
gracing roadsides, fields, cemeteries, yard on yard,
lifting nonchalant limbs skyward again,
tossing creamy ecstasies to the breeze
just beyond our busy, downcast eyes.

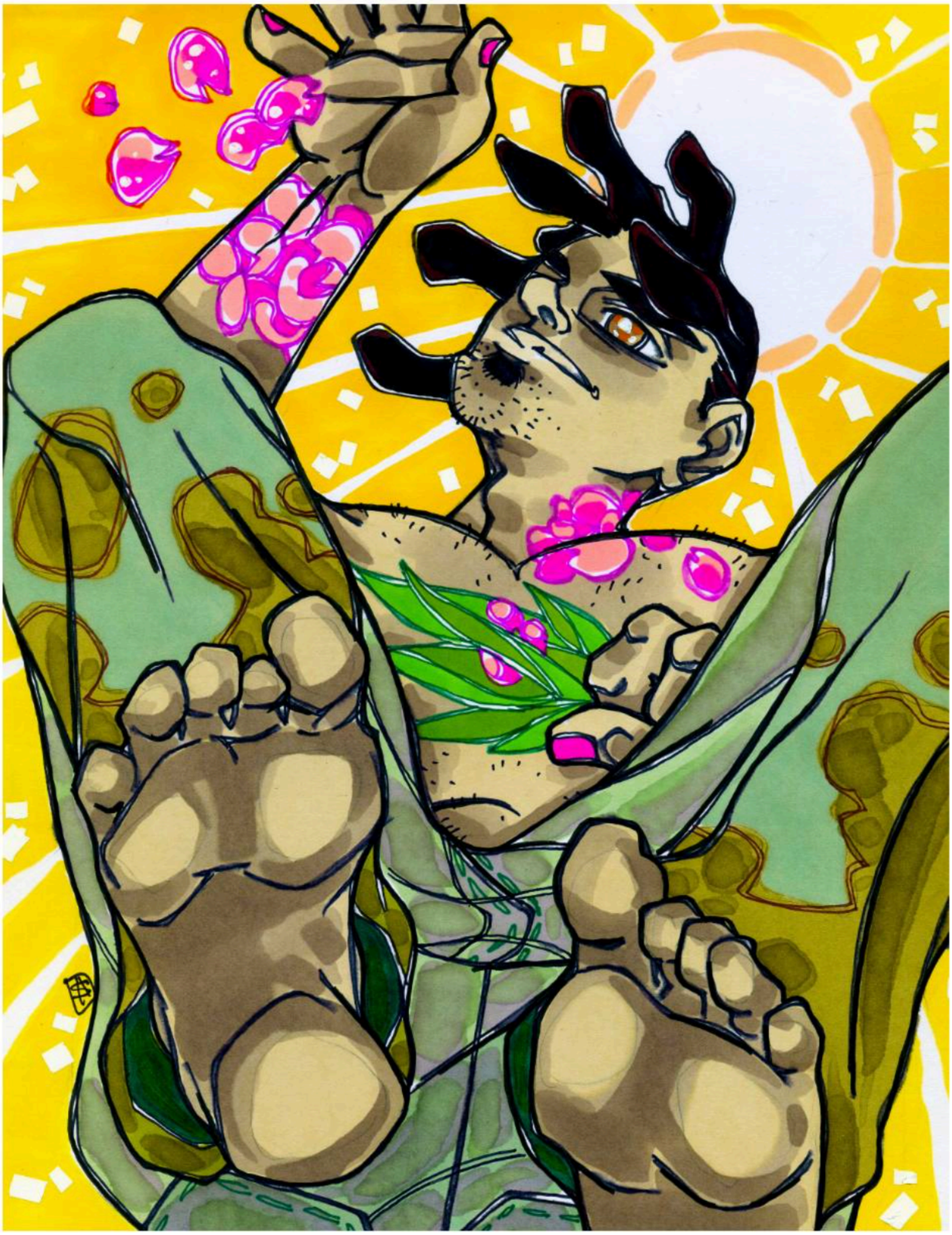
Little you care it's still March, not April,
this year even hotter than others,
or that ironic winter ice threatened your limbs.
Little you care you're blithely ignored,
all but shrouded in exhausting human clouds.

What a shame to marginalize you, though.
In passing we should offer more than a glance,
or maybe even quit our silly errands
to rest ourselves at your grassy feet
in wordless awe and devotion.

For you sentinels are far wiser than we,
assuming a lot less than we claim to know,
you innocent omens of oncoming heat.
But you have no need to forgive us, perfect trees,
gifts with no use for our guilt – or our gratitude.

*—Don Perryman*

*Opposite page: "Wolfy WolFang" by Dick Mitchell.*



"Spring" by Shannon Hedges. Mixed Media on MM Paper.

# Garden

With Popsicle sticks and string
I go into the yard
and stake out my garden
for the coming spring.

Blue bearded iris here
red cosmos there
purple alyssum
encircling all.

A siren shrieks down Church Street
and I recall the hiss of oxygen
his sour smell
his yellow hands.

I'll plant some white calla lilies
I'll try some celery
I'll buy pink roses
and orange poppy seeds.

The black shadow of the fence
creeps slowly by my side
and now a breath of wind
as gentle as his last.

So smooth, so fine
he's there now,
that place, that peace;
I hope it's true.

The sweet smell of onion weed
arises as I kneel
and place my pale palms
on the brown earth.

His chest is quiet now.

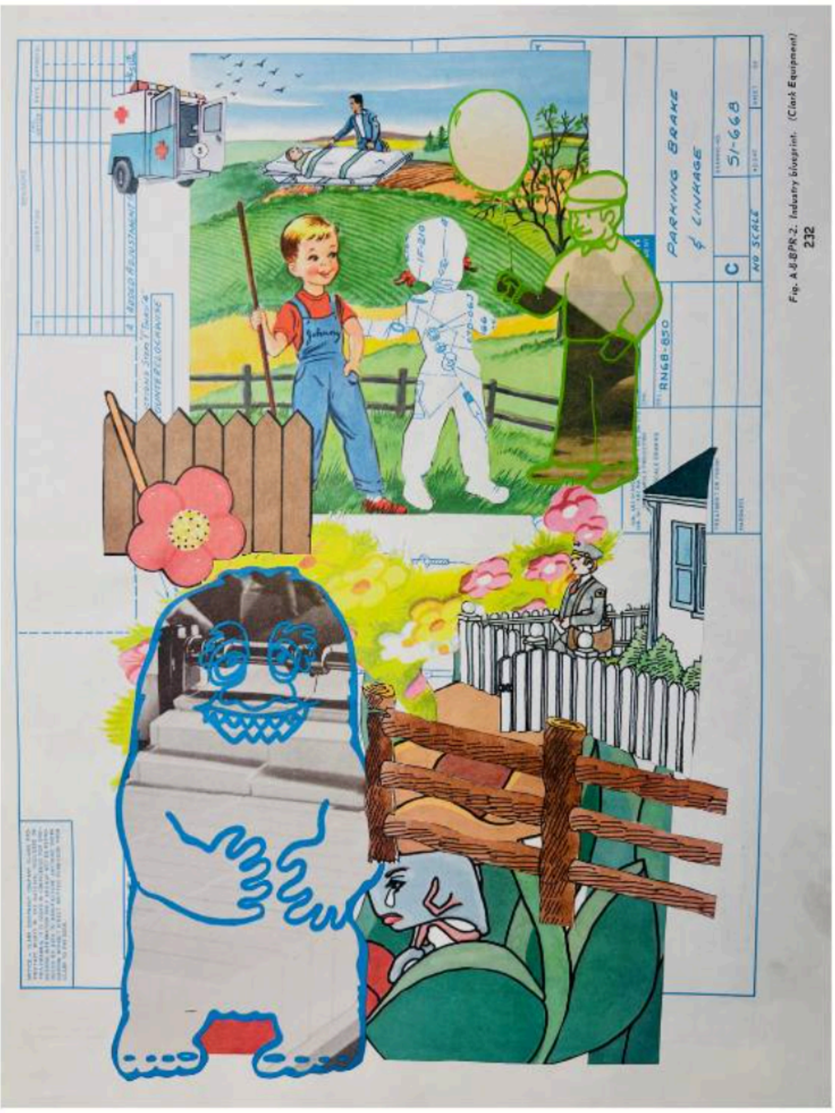
I take the thin stick and push.
The soil,
today,
so easily allows.

There's a lot to measure
and to plan.

He would approve.

And he is gone.

*—Ed of All People*


PARKING BRAKE
& LINKAGE
51-668
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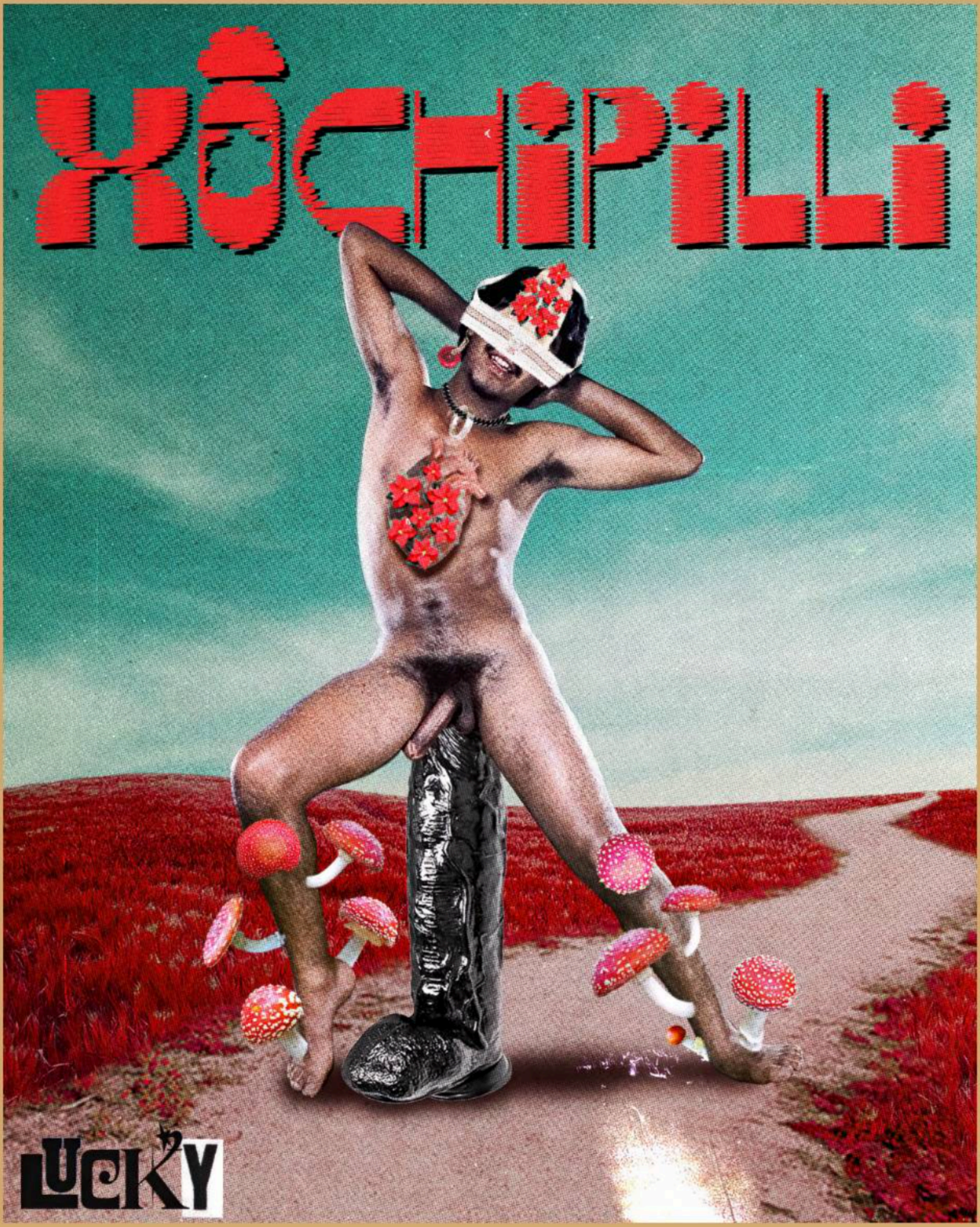
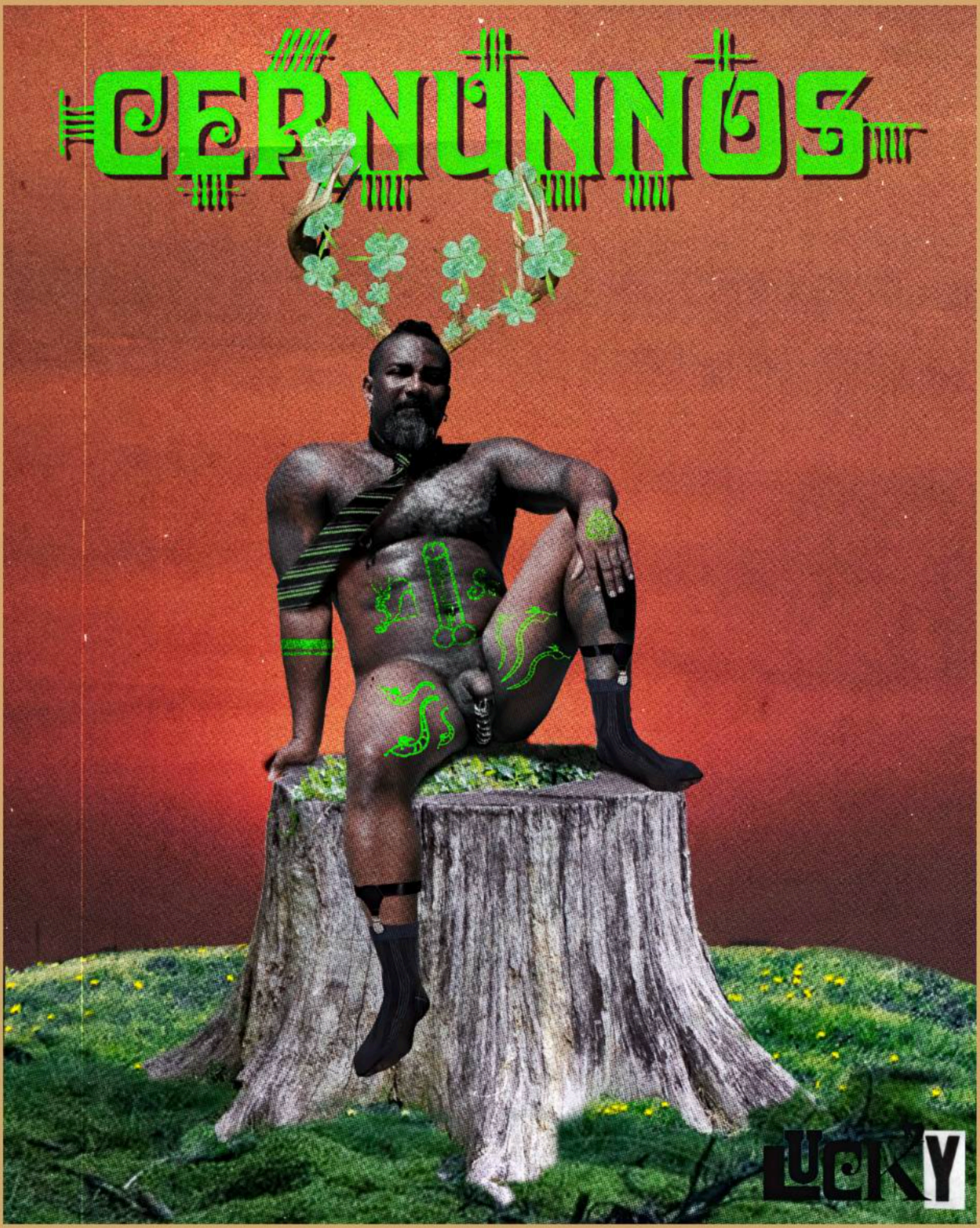
Johnny
Fig. A-8-BPR-2. Industry blueprint. (Clark Equipment)
232

*"Everything in the Garden," by Kirk Read.*


XŌCHIPILLI
LUCKY

*"Xōchipilli" by Lucky Soul. Aztec God of Homosexuality, name means "Flower Prince".*


CERNUNNOS
LUCKY

*"Cernunnos" by Lucky Soul. Celtic and Neopagan god of fertility and sexuality, worshipped among queer witches.*

# Husbandry

Ground thawed from frost this week,
the man tills his land. Green winter rye
folds under wet lumps of quickening soil.

Above his plot, honeybees zoom.
Freed from the hive, they suck nectar,
catch pollen, then chase the breezes
home to dance their waggle dance.

The sun warms soil, bees, man's back.
He sweats, and pulls his wet shirt off.
The sun warms his face. The flush
tells him: this sun could parch bees.

The man fills two white bucket lids
with fresh water, arranges stones within.
Bees rest there, drink their fill, fly on.

*—David Milley*

# Review of Edmund White's
## *The Loves of My Life: A Sex Memoir*
*by Leo Racicot*

Edmund White has never let any barriers get in his way, not in his public life, not in his writing.

In his upcoming memoir, *The Loves of My Life: A Sex Memoir*, he chronicles a lifetime of sexual adventures: his furtive explorations with other similarly closeted boys, growing up in The Midwest, his not-unpleasant dalliances with women, in an attempt to "go straight", his myriad sexual conquests once he had come fully out as a gay man, many of them men who would become the models for characters in his many fine novels. In this new book, White displays his trademark courage for taking on taboo subject matter, here writing so explicitly about sex that one wonders how the reading public in these ridiculously PC, "woke" times will react. But this was Mr. White's life. And if a writer can't write about his/her own life, what is he left to write about?

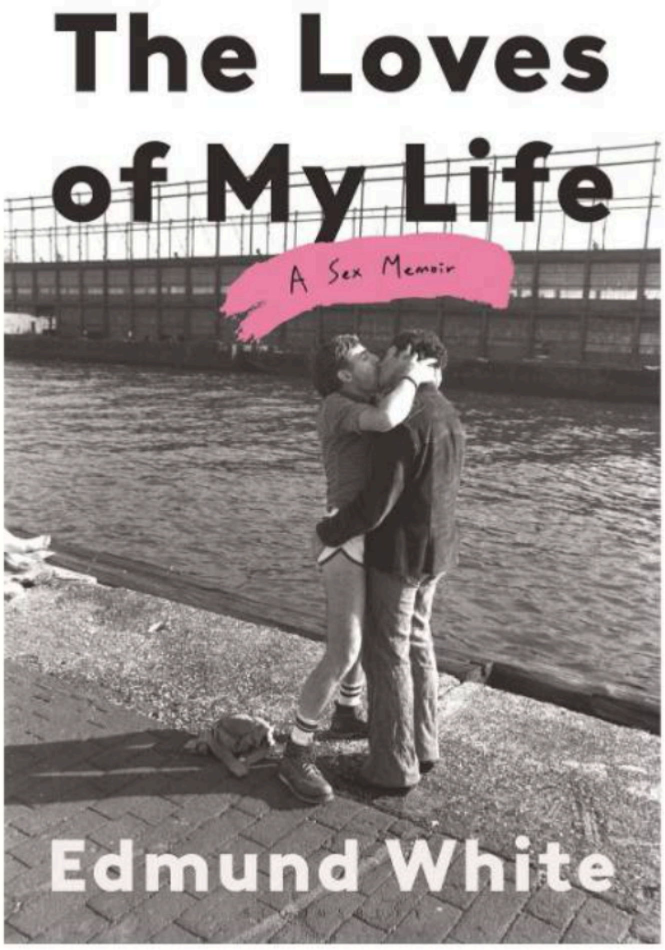
*The Loves of My Life* is classic Edmund White. In prose that is unrivalled, stacked with a vocabulary that is to be envied, he takes on subjects and stories that might, in some areas of the literary and cultural world, still be considered verboten; even a chapter intellectualizing BDSM gets down to the nitty-gritty of what makes lovers of pain (giving and receiving) tick.

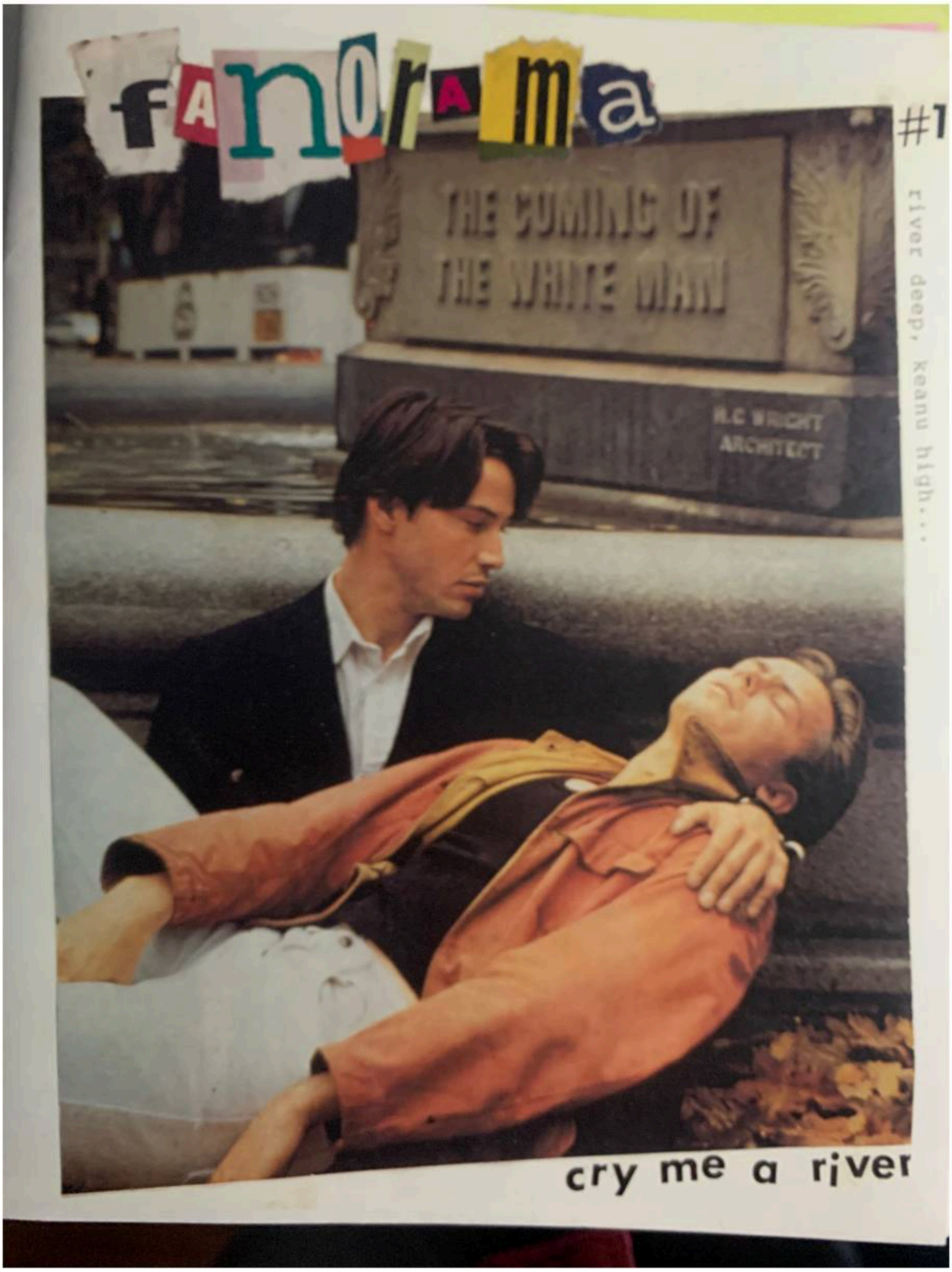
A kind of glee infuses this book. It's as if White is getting a kick out of remembering and sharing his lifetime of sexcapades. Prudes are sure to pass out. Although among White's legion of admirers, can there be even a single prude? I once saw him read to a large audience made up mostly of blue-haired Brookline/Beacon Hill old ladies (no prudes there!). He also used to have a fan club made up solely of adolescent Japanese girls, so his readership is varied, spread wide as a surprise across the globe.

White pulls no punches in this memoir, a catalog of the variety of ways in which his lovers, his boyfriends, his tricks and he, himself, derive pleasure. But this memoir isn't a frivolous pitch; it's important for the uninformed to know how and why gay men lived and loved. Other than the Marquis de Sade, I can't think of any writer who has chronicled his/her sex life so candidly (possibly Anais Nin?), without a whiff of shame. No White geisha blushing behind an apologetic fan. Certainly, no gay writer has done this.

And there should be zero shame. Mr. White is simply being beautifully, unapologetically human in this book. And that, and he, are a delight. Revealing the intimacies of one's sex life, so unabashedly, so joyously opens one up to vulnerability, in much the same way a customer eases himself down into a barber's chair for a razor shave. One is left totally exposed.

Each chapter here also presents the reader with sharp, psychological analyses of character, examining the motives behind why gay men pursue who and what they love. This book is also great fun; I finished it in two sittings, something I never do.




fanorama
#1
river deep, keanu high...
THE COMING OF THE WHITE MAN
H.C WRIGHT ARCHITECT
cry me a river

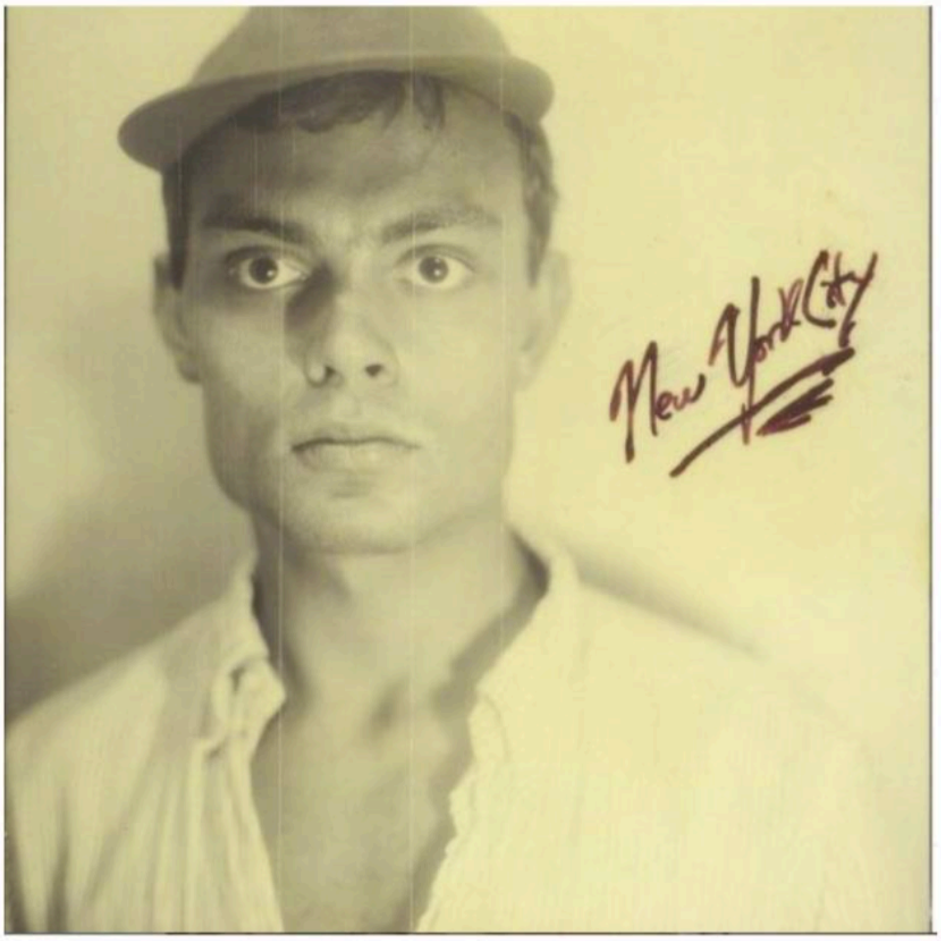
*Cover of Fanorama #1.*

# REB: Dreaming Deep, Holding the Center

*by Shimmer*

When I met him, he thought of himself as 'the Boy with the Invisible Heart.' He was quiet, introspective, but in his striking features there simmered an intensity I must have honed in on. Our conversations were redolent of Tarot archetypes, flower power, the wiles and heartbreak of the beautiful boys of the world, our shared elusive dreams of revolution and transfiguration. These fragments we have shored against our ruin.

My late comrade REB (Richard E. Bump) was a man of many talents, dreams, and pursuits; among them were provocateur, poetic terrorist, punk, offbeat impresario, underground filmmaker, photographer, patron, zine distro doyen, adoptive Dad, memoirist, DIY magician, farmer, homemaker, artist, activist, and for a period, Radical Faerie. So much life, so much art, so much beauty and so many moments of wonder, heartbreak and despair in a life spanning sixty-eight years. Who knows where the time goes?



Born a Gemini on May 25, 1956, REB had a conventional childhood and adolescence in Portland, Maine, attending the Waynflete School, where he became class President in his senior year. In 1974 he moved to Providence, RI to matriculate at Brown University. He was swift to embrace the freedom this move offered. In a 1975 diary entry, he proclaimed:

Everyone on campus knows I'm gay now. I'm the President of Gay Lib…we're working to eradicate stereotypical sex roles. I find myself becoming more militant every day. I'm a fag and I finally don't care who the fuck knows it.

He survived gay-bashing in 1976, went to New York on a visit, and began to immerse himself in radical circles. And Punk, which was to become a huge influence, was right around the corner.

Inspired by the audacious Homocore/Queercore zines coming out of Toronto, REB began publishing his own zine in 1992. *Fanorama* was a kaleidoscope of unabashedly blatant queer eroticism and underground cultural ferment. But it was more, too. The zine interrogated racism, sexism, assimilationism and commercialism in current queer culture, profiling artists who ranged from River Phoenix to Vaginal Creme Davis, anonymous boy, G. B. Jones and way beyond. Leading zine news organ *Fact Sheet Five* once proclaimed *Fanorama* as 'the granddaddy of queerzines'—a rather extreme bit of hyperbole, which however did emphasize the fact that Fano lasted longer than most. It comprised a total of thirty-one issues, with the final one coming out after a ten year hiatus in 2017.

Above and beyond this broad spectrum of engagement, *Fanorama* was also very personal for REB. Amidst a spectrum of work by various contributors, the focus of each issue followed what was going on in REB's life at the time, and specifically, just who he was dating, and what the current boyfriend was into. Several issues charted the epic of REB's love for Collin Chase in the mid 1990s. It was because of Collin that REB became more involved in AIDS activism, as well as beginning to explore Pagan, occult, New Age modalities, particularly Tarot and astrology. And it was eventually Collin's presence in REB's life that led to his attendance at his first Faerie convocation at the Winter Solstice of 1996.

I met REB at a Heart Circle sometime in the Fall of 1998. Each of us had an introspective side and we gravitated towards one another—as comrades, rather than potential lovers. In person, REB was a quiet, low-key guy in social situations. He really seemed to blossom either one on one or in conversations with just a few people. We exchanged thoughts about Tarot cards, herbalism, Magick, intentional community, zines, underground film and no doubt lots else. For a time, the greater Faerie Circle seemed exactly what he had been seeking for years. He loved going out to the woods with other free spirits and getting really natural. Shaking loose the dirt and grime of the overculture.

A particularly magical moment for him was the day the Labyrinth was created at Faerie Camp Destiny. In *Fanorama* 19 (November 1999), he recalled: *I had the good fortune of holding the rope at the center of the inner circle where the altar would grow, and as I sat there and held the rope tight as my fey brothers slowly scratched the ground and circled around me, I felt a tremendous sense of brotherhood and tranquillity. It seemed to me that we had done this before. Somewhere in time we had gathered and planted wheat or rice in geometric patterns. Perhaps at some other time we had laid out the design for the great Aztec or Mayan cities. There was something about this sight that rang true and familiar in my ancient DNA.*

In June 2000, REB organized 'A Date with Destiny' at Providence's iconic AS220 performance space. It was a benefit for Faerie Camp Destiny. Performers included Kenneth Cote, Shade Violet, Matt Bucy, Matt Wolf, and myself (under my former Faerie name of Helga–I did a skit based on the 'wig toilet scene' from *Valley of the Dolls*). REB and Jim Jackson showed their beautiful and potent Faerie videos. It was a memorable evening.

Around this time REB wrote several very poetic, emotionally charged memoirs of his experiences with the Faeries. At one gathering, he recalled:

*And another Full Moon waxed and waned and I was approached by another youth wearing an elegant frock and a face full of glitter and before I knew it we were making out and doing beastly things around the kitchen camp fire. This sudden public display of erotic affection in front of my friends and family made me feel a little naughty and a little dirty but more importantly, it made me feel. And as we commingled as one, my heart beat loud enough for those sitting near the fire to hear it for the first time beneath my flesh.*

REB's involvement with the Faeries tapered off due to various other involvements after Beltane of 2002. But his friendship with one particular Faerie, Dogwood Bark aka Dogwoodie, led to deeper interest in both photography and filmmaking. His films were typically shot on Super 8: he had an innate suspicion of newer, more streamlined forms of tech. REB's photography was featured occasionally in issues of *RFD* starting in 2001. One of his photos featured again on the back cover of an issue last year (2024), so the connection remained potent even as his interest shifted away from the

Faerie circles.

By 2002, REB had become more focused on providing outreach and practical help for prisoners. This quickly resulted in his forming a distribution service (or 'distro') for prisoner-created zines, and even sharing *Fanorama* issue 27.5 with gifted musician Chadd Beverlin's *Left Behind* (Chadd was released shortly thereafter). In all he provided distribution for some sixteen titles created and produced by prisoners.

REB's work was hailed in several venues over the years. Articles about him in the significant Punk publications *Maximum Rocknroll, Punk Planet* and *Metal Maniacs* saluted his place in the greater Punk multiverse. He traveled to Milwaukee in April 2017 as an honored guest of Kweerblam, a celebration hosted by Queer Zine Archive Project. He screened five of his films, and further marked that year with a final issue of *Fanorama*, Hard up (issue 31).

REB's final and in some ways happiest project began late in 2020, and was launched in the Spring of 2021, as the Pandemic lockdown began to lift. In the guise of Luke Potter, backyard gardener and dedicated canning maestro, he spoke of his goals as building "a sustainable community of like-minded individuals dedicated to feeding our families healthy, organic food while preserving the traditions of our ancestors." His books, one of which became a best seller on a popular online retail site, were intended to assist readers in mastering "the Zen of home-based gardening." Apart from practical instruction manuals, his publications included the charming *Zen Flowers Adult Coloring Book*–Flower Power flies again!

Practical guides to planting, harvesting and canning sound reminiscent of many early issues of *RFD.* And since he had begun helping with the family garden as a child, there was perhaps a sense for him of coming full circle with these activities. He was especially proud to win the Blue Ribbon First Prize at the August 2023 Washington County Fair for a selection of his canned goods. A year later, already fighting the cancer that would eventually end his life, he wrote on his blog:

*In the hospital yesterday; all day in the kitchen today. Getting my entries ready for the The Washington County Fair. Pictured: Rosy Fruit Cocktail, Classic Dill Pickles, Sweet 'n Spicy Radishes, Hot 'n Sweet Pickled Peppers infused with Olive Oil, and Amish White Bread.*

One other project was the reprinting of some of his personal sex diaries in two brief collections under the byline Jason Tyler, an alias derived from the purported author of a book entitled *Chicken-Hawk Cop* (1978). Volume one of two, *The Lost Boys Journal*, included an episode simply titled 'John' dated December 11, 1985:

*He smelled of axle grease and demolition derbies and Marlboros. I pulled off his jeans, lifted his legs over his head and licked his crack chowing down on his hairless virgin asshole. He moaned and squirmed in pleasure saying no one had ever done that to him before. ... He fucked me fast and furiously and said it was better than fucking his girlfriend. He slept naked in my bed next to me and we listened to a heavy metal radio station all night.*

REB passed away a few days after the Winter Solstice of 2024 after a valiant battle with cancer. Though it's been many years since our last meeting, I still feel his presence. On these February mornings, I find myself looking at all the roving young guys in the college town where I work and wondering which ones would have caught REB's eye. And I remember how Collin quoted Alice Walker's words to him one painful day: 'Resistance is the secret of joy.' REB's own life as he lived it was a defiant testament to those words. Hail the Traveler!

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LGBTQ+ LITERARY FESTIVAL
NEW ORLEANS

# Saints and Sinners Meets RFD

Poets Franklin Abbott and Steven Riel and scholar Jason Ezell will be doing a lecture at this year's Saints & Sinners LGBTQ+ Literary Festival in New Orleans being held March 28-30, 2025.

They plan on focusing on the poetry that has graced RFD's pages through the years while Jason will also discuss the history and aims of RFD.

We are so thankful to hear this is happening to help celebrate RFD's fifty years in print. Hopefully, we'll be able to reflect on how the lecture went in an upcoming issue.

You can find out more about this year's Saints and Sinners by checking out their website: www.sasfest.org

# Rainbow Book Fair in NYC

RFD will be tabling again this year at the Rainbow Book Fair at New York City's LGBT Center on May 10, 2025 from noon to 6 PM. For more information on the Rainbow Book Fair - rainbowbookfair.com

13TH ANNUAL
Rainbow
Book Fair
MAY 10TH, 2025

## REUNION GATHERING
## 13–22 OF JUNE, 2025
## TERSCHELLING, THE NETHERLANDS

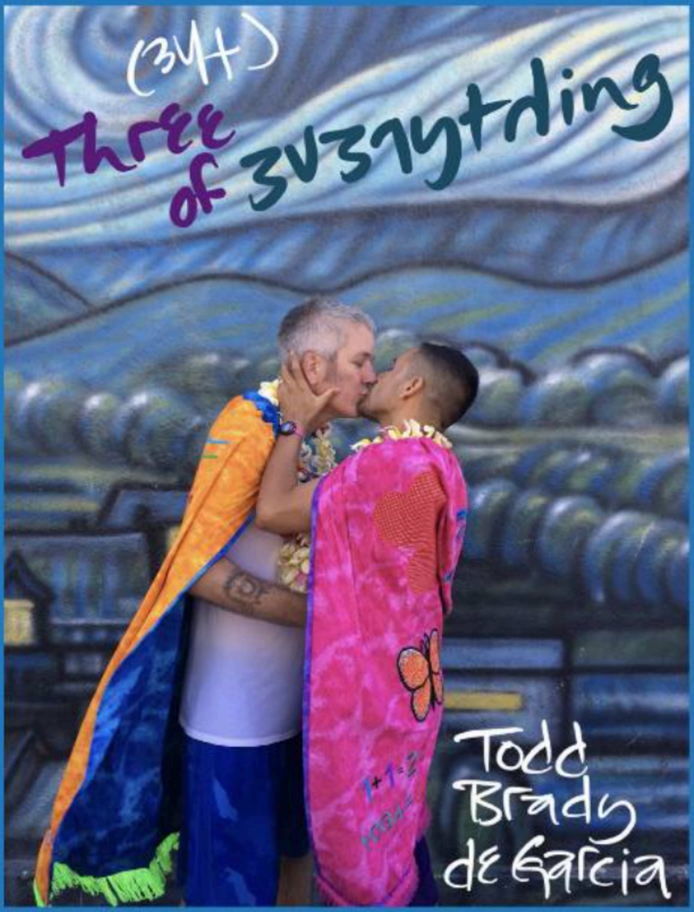
30 years
of Radical Faeries in Europe

On the 24th of June, 1995, in a communal house called *De Wierschuur*, located between the North Sea and the marshes of the island of Terschelling, the Radical Faeries gathered to celebrate their European homecoming. Three decades later, it's now time for all Faeries – the ones who were present at that first ritual, as well as others who joined the EuroFaeries community later, to gather again and to celebrate! We want to enjoy the magic, love and happiness which we created back then and which has since been reborn in numerous gatherings throughout Europe and around the globe. Let's meet in heart circles and create meaningful, yet playful, rituals, through which we can look back to where we came from while contemplating where we currently are. Let's also dance, sing, play, prepare meals and dine together or immerse ourselves in the beautiful nature of the island, with its vast sandy beaches and its hiking, biking and swimming. Let's simply celebrate all the community and magic of Faeriedom!

Space is limited to 30 faeries, so please apply early! For more information, contact: T30gathering@proton.me

Today is this...
Todd Brady de Garcia

*Today is this…*
*poem shapes and word knots from the Multicolored Universe*


Three
of everything
Todd
Brady
de Garcia

*when you have already lived all of your lives and still, you continue to find yourself going and going and going you are living (the) Three of everything*

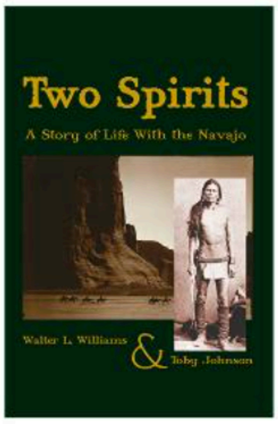
1+1=22
Todd Brady de Garcia

*1+1=22 : The Math of God*

A trilogy of LGBTQ+ poetry, exploring the nature of love, family, mental health and spiritual abuse, addiction and recovery, surviving losses and living within the epiphanies and evolutions of the present. More books will follow these three, as they continue breathing themselves into existence, just as these books have. Hopefully, once you have read any or all of them, you will find yourself writing one, two, or three of your own. Love, toddymanners

Hardbacks, paperbacks, and e-books all available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and everywhere else that has Ingram Books as their supplier.

you can find me at
toddymanners.com


Two Spirits
A Story of Life With the Navajo
Walter L. Williams & Toby Johnson

Two Spirits

A Story of Life With the Navajo

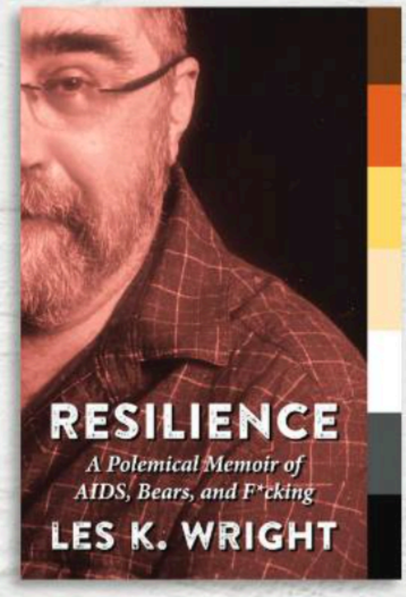
Set in the Civil War era of the 1860s, this historical novel of the fabled Old West is an enlightening, accurate, and moving account of oppression and tragedy. It is also a romantic and engaging tale of love, sexuality, personal discovery, and ultimate triumph —and a great read.

Available from amazon.com and
tobyjohnson.com
(There's a wonderful Audible version.)

"RESILIENCE READS LIKE A HISTORY OF A HALF-CENTURY OF OF GAY AMERICAN LIFE, CONDENSED INTO ONE MAN'S INTIMATE STORY."
—*Wayne Hoffman*

"WRIGHT'S STYLE OF WRITING IS CLEAR AND CONCISE, HONEST, AND EMOTIONALLY CHARGED AT ONCE."—*Perry Brass*

"*RESILIENCE* UNFOLDS THE PLEASURES AND PAINS OF GAY LIFE AND RAISES CHALLENGING QUESTIONS ABOUT SEX, SUFFERING, AND THE FAILURES OF QUEER REVOLUTION."
—*Tyler Bradway*



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May 4-12th Builder's Ball Gathering
August 1-21th Monsoon Gathering with a
Aug 9th Full Moon - potluck and dance party;
Oct 31 - Nov 8th Samhain & Dia de Los Muertos Gathering with a
Nov 5th Full Moon - potluck and dance party

Check our website for more information on regular monthly events
(potlucks, heart circles and more)!

zms.org

QUUSP
GenreQueer
Easter Retreat
in France

Exploring Queerness & Community through Writing
April 18-23, 2025

This is a retreat for LGBTQ+ authors who already have, or would like to develop, a writing practice. Join us for a creative writing retreat with a balanced mind/body program, including somatic exercises to help you unwind and tap deeply into your creativity. Let yourself be inspired by our unique setting in a centuries old stone-built farm house in the Dordogne, one of France's less known but most charming regions.

For more
info and
registration,
visit
quusp.com.

## Issue 203 / Fall 2025

# THE CLOSET

*Submission Deadline: August 15, 2025*
*www.rfdmag.org/upload*

As the world grows increasingly repressive toward the LGBTQ community, many of us find ourselves navigating renewed threats of homophobia, sexism, and transphobia. While our prior issue focused on resilience and resistance remains essential, we ask you to consider the role of "the closet" as a tool for safety, a means of controlling our visibility based on circumstance, and a space for self-exploration.

For many, being "out" has been a defining aspect of identity. However, as bias and violence resurface on a larger scale, some must now retreat to protective spaces. But how do we safeguard ourselves while maintaining our sense of community?

Historically, the "closet" has been viewed as a place of isolation, yet for others, it provided a crucial space to understand their identities before revealing them to trusted allies. It has also served as a metaphor for creativity—where we explored our butch, femme, S/M, and campy sides, where drag closets became sanctuaries of self-expression through fabric and performance. The closet has never been just about hiding; it has also been about shaping, refining, and preparing ourselves to step into the world on our terms.

Now, without regressing into complete concealment, how can we repurpose the closet as a space for both safety and self-affirmation? How do we balance the need for protection while opening our doors to those in need? We have faced repression before and persevered—what lessons from the past can guide us in resisting today's challenges?

As we approach Coming Out Day on October 11, we invite you to share your reflections—imagery, poetry, essays—on the power of the closet. Together, let's explore how to stay safe, stay seen, and stay strong in these conflicted times.